

## **DOCTORAL THESIS**

### **Making Sense of Dance-Making Interaction and Organisation in Contemporary Choreographic Processes**

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# Making Sense of Dance-Making

## *Interaction and Organisation in Contemporary Choreographic Processes*

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD

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## **Abstract**

The relationship between dancers and choreographers has often been described as problematic, with the dancer as the silent victim of the powerful choreographer. On the other hand, contemporary choreography has been presented as an inherently collaborative process in which the dancer participates in the creation of movement material, even if she is not credited as a co-author. My thesis explores what we can learn about the social organisation of contemporary choreographic practices by shifting our methodological focus from dance studies to the study of organisational behaviour and interaction. This interdisciplinary approach is based on an understanding of professional dance companies as work organisations with goals to achieve and resources to manage. Professional dance-making is a work activity, and therefore dance companies must be to some extent comparable with other organisations functioning in the same cultural and societal framework. I suggest that by using theories of organisational behaviour to contextualise dancers' and choreographers' work relationships we can better understand how their professional identities are implicated in choreographic practices.

The data for this research come from two ethnographic case studies of professional contemporary dance companies in the process of making new work. Thematic analysis has been combined with close readings of communicative events to shed light on how choreographic processes are socially constructed and organised through multimodal embodied interaction between the participants. The study shows that in order to understand the dancer's agency and sensemaking in a choreographic process it is crucial to understand that communication encompasses all aspects of behaviour, not just verbal activity, and that the choreographer's leadership is dependent on the

dancers' cooperative followership. Organisational concepts such as sensemaking and communities of practice, and theories of leadership, followership and communication, were found to be in many ways applicable to contemporary choreographic processes, suggesting that this perspective could be useful for dance practitioners and scholars alike.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

In January 2015, I had the opportunity to hear philosopher Graham McFee give a talk explaining his position on the roles of dancer and choreographer with regard to dance works (works of art; performables).<sup>1</sup> In his book *The Philosophical Aesthetics of Dance: Identity, Performance and Understanding* (2011), McFee argues that while the choreographer is the artist who creates the dance, the dancer's role is that of a "craft master" rather than artist. This statement rankled with the audience, and the purpose of McFee's talk was to defend it by clarifying the role of the choreographer as the ultimate decision maker, the one whose fulfilled intentions the performance represents, and therefore the (only) artist in the equation, without in any way underestimating the skills and importance of the dancers.<sup>2</sup>

I am interested in the strength of the reaction McFee's assertion inspired. The somewhat sceptical and at times almost hostile reception of his ideas amongst dance practitioners and researchers gives a taste the atmosphere surrounding the work that dancers and choreographers do. The division of labour in (contemporary) dance is (still) an ethical issue, and terminology matters terribly.<sup>3</sup> Professional identities are at stake. Both dancers and choreographers seem to be very aware of this, particularly in relation to authorship, with many programmes stating that the work was

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<sup>1</sup> Graham McFee gave a talk entitled "A Tale of Two Hats: Dancer and Choreographer" at the University of Roehampton on the 13th of January, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> McFee is willing to admit that the role of choreographer can be shared between many people, and that one person can act both as a dancer and a choreographer in the process, but I wonder which decisions count as "artistic" ones and whether the choreographer's veto somehow diminishes the decisions that dancers inevitably have to make.

<sup>3</sup> My data comes from contemporary dance, as does much of the discussion on the topic.

choreographed, devised or created by the choreographer in collaboration with the performers/dancers, and *directed* by the choreographer.<sup>4</sup>

Performance studies, and by extension dance studies, have embraced the notion of artistic collaboration (see e.g. Cvejić, 2005, Laermans, 2012). Since I began this research in 2012, London has seen two symposia on collaboration (2012 & 2013, Middlesex University) and a panel discussion on creative collaboration, the latter arranged in conjunction with the Dance Umbrella festival in 2013 and featuring choreographers Siobhan Davies and Akram Khan on the panel.<sup>5</sup> How artists work together is clearly something that interests the academic and artistic community. Dance scholars have shown particular interest in the contemporary dancer's professional identity and agency in creative processes (see e.g. Roche, 2009 & 2011; Roos, 2013 & forthcoming; Rouhiainen, 2003; Tomic-Vajagic, 2012). Others have focused on the dynamics and ethics of dancer-choreographer relationships (e.g. Butterworth, 2002 & 2009; Newell & Fortin, 2011; Rouhiainen, 2002). Contemporary dance and contemporary dance research seem to be in the process of (re)defining the division of labour in choreographic processes.

Of course the restructuring of roles is not a new phenomenon in dance: we learn from Sally Gardner (2007), for example, how the dancing choreographers of early modern dance changed the modes of production prevalent in the dance that came before, while the Judson Dance Theater is famous for eschewing existing hierarchies in dance-making in the 1960s (see e.g. Van Dyke 1992). The emphasis on collaboration and ethical dancer-choreographer relationships in current choreographic practices could be

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<sup>4</sup> This actually seems to support McFee's idea of the division of labour between dancer and choreographer, only here decision-making is the task of the director – who also tends to be the choreographer.

<sup>5</sup> The discussion is available to view online at <https://vimeo.com/77687613>.

seen as the latest development in a long tradition of democratisation. From this perspective, McFee's unwillingness to let dancers share the label of artist with choreographers may appear as a desperate paddle against the current of equal opportunities. But what is happening in dance studios, between dancers and choreographers? What, if anything, do "collaboration", "democracy", "ethics" or "artist" denote in the day-to-day practice of dance-making? How can we make sense of the roles that dancers and choreographers undertake in choreographic processes without digging into trenches?

My research stems from a desire to understand the social realities of how contemporary dance is made today. I suggest that the way to achieve this is to look away from choreography as art and observe dance and dance-making as work. The aim of my thesis is to show how dancers and choreographers, as professional experts in their field, organise their work and participate in work activities. Instead of analysing artistic practice I will shift the methodological focus from dance studies to organisational behaviour and investigate dance-making as a social context, a professional activity undertaken by trained experts at their place of work. Professional dance companies are organisations with goals to achieve and human and knowledge resources to manage. Dance companies should, therefore, be at least to some extent comparable with other organisations and institutions functioning in the same cultural and societal framework. I suggest that by using theories of organisational behaviour to contextualise dancers' and choreographers' work relationships we can better understand how their professional identities are implicated in choreographic practices and gain new perspectives into creative artistic processes in contemporary dance.

My approach to dance companies as organisations is grounded in social constructionism: I view the social reality of choreographic processes as being continuously constructed in interaction between the participants. It follows that dance-making, like any social situation, can be studied by analysing the communication that constitutes it. Communication scholar W. Barnett Pearce distinguishes between constructivists who “see communication as a *cognitive* process of *knowing* the world” and social constructionists who “see it as a *social* process of *creating* the world” (1995:98; emphases original). The social constructionist’s focus is on how we act “into” a context, fitting into existing, ongoing patterns, while at the same time through our actions making that context real and meaningful (Pearce, 1995:100). It is this creation of choreographic processes through communication that interests me. Can we make sense of dance-making by investigating the interaction through which it is organised? What stories are being made real, as Pearce (1995:100) puts it, in dancers’ and choreographers’ actions?

## 1.2 Objectives and methods

My research questions have been inspired and informed by Gardner’s (2007) analysis of how three prominent modern dance scholars (Susan Leigh Foster, 1986, 1997; Amy Koritz, 1995; Randy Martin, 1990) have conceptualised “the relations of production between the choreographer and the dancer in the modern dance group” and how they may have at times failed to recognise “an intersubjective/intercorporeal relationship of dance-making between the dancer and the choreographer” (Gardner, 2007:51). The first objective of my thesis is to understand these “relations of production” in contemporary dance and see how they relate to the story of dancer-choreographer relationships found in dance literature, where on the one hand dancers are often

presented as somehow voiceless or powerless in relation to the choreographer, but on the other hand contemporary choreography is regarded as an inherently collective or collaborative enterprise.

My data comes from two ethnographic case studies with professional contemporary dance companies in the process of making new work, and this dissertation can be read as an ethnography of contemporary dance-making practices as work environments, but it is also a study of situated, embodied interaction, influenced by interactional sociolinguistics and conversation analysis, among other approaches. The second aim of my research is to explore the possibilities of conducting detailed analysis of communication between dancers and choreographers for the purpose of drawing more informed comparisons between the participants' actions (which may be based on tacit knowledge that they are not aware of) and their interview accounts of those actions (which are guided by how the interviewee wants to appear to the interviewer). Through transcriptions and descriptions of particular communicative events, I will draw attention to the complexities of face-to-face interaction in groups and the multimodal, embodied nature of interaction in the dance studio. Transcriptions of actual events enable a kind of zooming in and out between social organisation and conversational organisation.

The project's original focus on communication and my interest in the non-verbal aspects of interaction led me to consider conversation analysis, particularly as practised by Charles Goodwin (e.g. 1986, 2000, 2007), as a potential means of capturing the embodied nature of choreographic interaction in detail. During the project, however, it became increasingly clear that my ethnographic material, abundant though it was, was poorly suited to conversation analysis. Indeed, it would be



exceedingly difficult to create conditions that would allow the recording of not only all utterances but also all gestures, orientation, direction of gaze, and other embodied features of interaction as employed by each dancing participant as s/he moves around a room filled with other dancing participants. Although it was not possible, within the parameters of this project, to achieve the level of granularity required of recordings and transcriptions to be able to apply conversation analysis to choreographic processes, I still wanted to show that these phenomena exist in the interaction between dancers and choreographers. I have therefore included transcription symbols used by conversation analysts (see Appendix D) in my examples to give an idea of the multimodality of interaction in the dance-making process. I also discuss the influence of conversation analysis on my research and the problems I faced in chapter 3 (see 3.2.4, 3.3.1, 3.3.3, 3.5). As it stands, my analysis of situated interaction in choreographic processes highlights both the complexity of dance-making interaction and the issues that need to be solved before a full ethnomethodological investigation of communication in the choreographic process can be carried out.

Finally, my purpose is to make explicit the organisational characteristics of contemporary choreographic processes, and to suggest that defining dance-making in organisational terms may help us to better understand potential ethical issues in dancers' and choreographers' work relationships. This is not to take away from the mysteries of creativity and performance that many artists, including some of my interviewees, cherish, but to provide an alternative view to the phenomenological research that approaches the dancer's work from an individual, experiential perspective (e.g. Parviainen, 1998; Rouhiainen, 2003; Sheets-Johnstone, 1979). Acknowledging the dance company as a place of work and treating the choreographic process as a social situation, I focus on the roles and relationships that are available to

dancers and choreographers with regard to organisational rules and conventions. I will discuss how they negotiate their membership and participation in their communities of practice, substantiate their agency and division of labour through interaction, practise leadership and followership, and cooperate in various ways to make sense of the choreographic process they are involved in. These are viewed as interactive processes that take shape through communication.

Labelling choreographic processes with organisational terminology is important because without names we cannot talk about what we observe, if we even see it at all. Educational theorist Etienne Wenger explains that there is a connection between the concepts we have at our disposal and how we experience and act in the world:

An adequate vocabulary is important because the concepts we use to make sense of the world direct both our perception and our actions. We pay attention to what we expect to see, we hear what we can place in our understanding, and we act according to our world views.

(Wenger, 1998:8)

A leader or a follower, a marginal or a full member of a community, a collaborator or a decision-maker; if I do not perceive myself as one, I have less choice over how to act as one. As self-evident as our social roles may appear to us, consciously naming them can change how we construct them.

### 1.3 Central concepts

Before outlining the rest of the thesis, I will briefly introduce the central (titular) concepts and parties involved, beginning with choreography, choreographers and dancers. Choreographer Jonathan Burrows suggests that choreography “is about making a choice, including the choice to make no choice” (2010: 40). This resonates with how I have come to view (contemporary) choreographic processes during this

research: they are decision-making processes that begin with an idea, then branch out into various decision-making chains, some of which are brought together in the final work while others get cut short. Some branches are straightforward, some very squiggly. The starting point can be personally meaningful to the dance-maker(s) or possibly quite arbitrary. Decisions are so ubiquitous that to trace the whole process afterwards, or to make sense of it as an outsider, is nearly impossible.

Making sense of the process in their slightly different ways are the choreographer and the dancers. How they do this is the topic of chapter 4.6. For now, as an introduction to how dancers and choreographers are represented literature, here is how Paula Thomson (2011:344) describes their roles in the *Encyclopedia of Creativity*: the choreographer's task is to "create new dances", a wide-ranging job that includes casting and design choices, selection of music, participating in "producing the dance" and "establish[ing] the style and specific steps of the dance". The dancer "give[s] life to the dynamic expression of the work" using her well-maintained "physical skills and a vivid imagination", "ingredients" that the choreographer "expect[s] dancers to provide" (Thomson, 2011:344). The choreographer oversees all aspects of the production; the dancer is a skilled interpreter at the choreographer's disposal. Thomson characterises their relationship as one of interdependence, but inadvertently highlights their power imbalance and the ambivalence that characterises the dancer's role when she describes a collaborative process in which the dancer is nevertheless regarded as an instrument:

The majority of choreographers compose new works on the mobile bodies of dancers who will then share in maintaining the memory of the work. Since this process is *collaborative*, dancers frequently join in the creation of the dance. The quality of how they move, the technical skills that they possess, and their unique physical appearance all influence the creation of a dance work; most choreographers will cast dancers with these elements in mind.

The dancer is the choreographer's *instrument* and may even be the inspiration for a new work.

(Thomson, 2011:344; emphases added)

Most of the aspects of the dancer-choreographer relationship mentioned here can also be found in much other dance literature: dancers' bodies as the choreographer's material, dancers as skilled, individual and creatively influential, and the choreographer presiding over the casting process and the creation. Whether the dancers are invited to "join in the creation of the dance" or just do so spontaneously is unclear, as is the mode of their participation, but a process of composing the work *on* dancers is nevertheless defined as collaborative. I will return to different perspectives on the dancer's role with regard to the choreographer and vice versa at various points throughout my analysis, and discuss collaboration in depth in chapter 4.4.

Whatever the dancer-choreographer relationship is like, it exists in interaction. Interaction can be defined as mutually influential behaviour between two people; the two people are said to be in a relationship if the interaction is frequent and their behaviour is interdependent, although the influence is typically asymmetrical (Berscheid & Ammazzalorso, 2001:309-310). Dancers' and choreographers' work relationships are asymmetrical in that the choreographer impacts the dancers' activities more than vice versa, but this is true of most relationships.

Building relationships – getting to know one another – means that we learn to expect how others will behave in various situations and to adjust our own behaviour accordingly, but at the same time the more expectations we have, the greater the chance that one of them will be violated, provoking us to react emotionally (Berscheid & Ammazzalorso, 2001:317). This may explain, in part, why choreographic processes would have a "difficult" stage at the point when dancers and choreographers are

beginning to know each other better – it may even be that conflict is a stage that relationships must go through as they become closer (Berscheid & Ammazalorso, 2001:319; see also 4.1.2). The importance of the behavioural coordination provided by expectations of others' behaviour can be seen in any task setting that requires cooperation: people need to get to know each other before they can work together effectively. Trust as a feature of organisational life is discussed further in 4.4.3.

Cooperation also requires communication, and good communication skills are important social capital in the workplace, as we “often rely on interactive and persuasive skills to get things done” (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 1982:4-5). Dance philosopher Jaana Parviainen (1998:132) suggests that the “choreographer's ability to transform an idea to movement and to find a communion with the dancer may have an enormous effect on the final choreography and its performing”. Joëlle Vellet (2011:228-229) emphasises the choreographer's need for good verbal skills as there are aspects of choreography that “cannot be made accessible to dancers without supplementary verbal explanations”, using metaphors to help the dancers “find the gestures by way of a search for sensation” – although the dancer may learn about the quality of movement required for example by taking class with the choreographer. Similarly for Randy Martin (1990:108-109), choreographic interaction consists primarily of a choreographer's verbal “adjustments of the danced paths”, but language remains external to the dancers' activities: “[r]arely will dancers think consciously of where they have to arrive, though they may be aware as they pass through the point of adjustment. Hence, language bounds physical activity but does not necessarily become part of it”.

Larry Lavender (2009:77-78) recognises that “[m]ost [dance] rehearsal environments are rich with verbal activity” but, continuing the list of talking choreographers, focuses almost exclusively on the choreographer’s “speech acts”, acknowledging only that “[e]xperienced dancers” may ask for clarifications or suggest solutions in response to the choreographer’s “negative reactions” while those less experienced “may stand mute and wait to be directed”. The choreographer’s “[p]rompts, manipulations, directives, and reactions” are described as actions towards the dancers; the dancers’ responses or initiatives are not discussed. The dancers, in turn, are cast as silent recipients of the choreographer’s words, although they are acknowledged as skilled in a kind of bodily expression. Helena Wulff (1998:6) even claims that

[m]any dancers are not very verbal people: they are trained to express themselves through their bodies, they have extreme body-consciousness. They communicate through their bodies even when they are not dancing. In general, dancers move their bodies more when they engage in a conversation than non-dancers, getting up from a chair, for example, in order to emphasize a point through gesturing with arms and legs.

Rather curiously she also suggests that “[i]t is obvious that some dancers are more talented than others in using words” and that “the best ones may become choreographers” (Wulff, 1998:103). Emphasising the dancers’ body awareness Wulff (1998:108) states that they are “strikingly skilled at communicating without looking at each other”, “communicating with their backs, calling attention to their presence, or relating to someone” and that they carry this skill over to how they move and behave when they are, for example, having a conversation. Unfortunately, Wulff does not provide any further evidence for these statements, and while they are not something that my study is designed to prove or disprove, I hope to show that any assertions about the quality or quantity of communication should be made with an understanding of the complexity of the phenomenon of communication. I will discuss this recurring theme

of talking choreographers and moving dancers further in chapter 4.2 and turn next briefly to the problem of writing about dance and embodied interaction.

Adrienne L. Kaeppler (1986:25-26) reminds us that dance “is both a product of human action and interaction as well as a process through which action and interaction take place”. It should be emphasised that my research concerns the former kind of interaction, the interaction that produces dance, rather than what the resulting dance may or may not mediate/communicate. I am not looking for the structure or meaning of dance; I am trying to identify structures and meanings that people use when they are communicating *about* dance. Nevertheless, this communication necessarily involves movement, and “like language, movement communicates”; it communicates “about social space, aesthetics, and philosophy of cultural forms” (Kaeppler, 1986:30).

Our ideas about communication typically rely heavily on language. The subject of communication in the context of movement and the body therefore necessarily raises questions about the relationships between mind, body and language. On the one hand, dance has been viewed as a choreographic language, a culturally specific system of meaningful movement structures. From this logocentric point of view, dance becomes a language to learn like any other and movement is analysed in terms of the structural and semantic properties of language (Sheets-Johnstone, 1984:128). On the other hand, this tendency to subject embodied practices to the rules of language has been criticised for prioritising mind over body and separating the two unnecessarily, and simply for not being an appropriate analogy since “[d]ance is unlike language, where at least a relation of signifier and signified is identifiable if not immutable”(Martin, 1995:109).

Dance scholars frequently remind us that dance is special because of the non-verbal nature of dance as communication and the primacy of the body, rather than some other

instrument, as a means of communicating. Yet our preoccupation with dance as bodily communication is, as Helen Thomas (1995:19) points out, symptomatic of the cultural weight we give language: “the very wording that is used to describe the form of communication of dance, non-verbal, implies that dance’s identity and difference are defined in terms of a lack *vis-à-vis* the dominant mode of communication, the verbal”. Still, in the wake of what Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (2009) calls the corporeal turn in humanities, I have tried to avoid reducing my view of interaction to its most easily transcribable, i.e. linguistic, elements, and keep returning to the complexity of interaction as an embodied phenomenon, albeit one that I struggle to represent adequately in writing.

Mention communication to dancers and dance scholars, and many of them will show interest and have opinions. Mention organisation to the same audience, and they usually start to look for a quick way out of the conversation. I understand, of course. We all communicate all the time, whereas organisations are a more distant concept. What is more, studies of organisational behaviour and management are generally concerned with improving the efficiency and profitability of commercial or public service organisations. This is not an obvious approach to take towards choreographic processes, which cannot be easily measured in financial terms,<sup>6</sup> and yet I claim it is a very relevant one. While increasing production or improving sales may not be the primary concern of arts practitioners, dance companies still need to manage their human resources. Depending on company structure, the dancer-choreographer relationship may also be a contractual commitment, adding legal and financial consequences to an already asymmetrical power relationship.

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<sup>6</sup> Professional dance companies and their productions of course have budgets to manage, but the actual choreographic work is somewhat separate from financial concerns.



Most importantly, dance cannot separate itself from society. I do not share all of Jan Van Dyke's (1992) worries about business values are encroaching upon how dance is produced and how dancers are educated. She laments that technique necessarily rules over creativity in education, that there is no room for experimentation in choreography and that dancers act like "corporate employees" in search of money and recognition in the job market (Van Dyke, 1992:137). I do think, however, that political and cultural influences affect the whole society, and that only by looking can we find out if and how contemporary dance relates to, emulates and differs from other organisational environments. Interestingly, some organisational researchers have already been doing the reverse and looking to the arts for new methods and concepts for understanding organisations. The field of organizational aesthetics covers topics ranging from "arts-based methods in organizations" to "theoretical accounts of aesthetic phenomena in organizations" and "art about/in/behind organizations" (*Organisational Aesthetics*, 2015:n.p.).<sup>7</sup> Research on "hybrid organizations" is interested in the ramifications of blending "aesthetic rationalities" with "instrumental logics" for a more "imaginative organizational life" (Harter et al., 2008:427). In some sense dance companies could be described as hybrid organisations in reverse: art is a self-evident part of their daily life but they also interact with organisations that are likely to prioritise financial performance (marketing departments, funding bodies, performance venues, etc.) and therefore need better organisational self-awareness.

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<sup>7</sup> Barry and Meisiek (2010:1507) have given the name "workarts" to the part of this field that is "about making or collecting art for the workplace in an attempt to challenge and improve the work, rather than managing the production, distribution, and presentation of art". They suggest that artistic interventions may help organisations overcome boredom and tiredness, encourage mindfulness and provide a defamiliarising effect that leads to richer sensemaking.

## 1.4 Chapter outline

In chapter 2, I review literature that in some way addresses dancer-choreographer relationships, mainly in modern and contemporary dance but also in ballet. Much of this literature deals more or less overtly with power relations, highlighting the dancer's lack of power in relation to the choreographer or methods to even out the imbalance, and forms the background against which I discuss the dancer's agency in chapter 4.2, the choreographer's leadership in 4.3 and their collaboration or co-operation in 4.4.

Chapter 3 begins by briefly grounding my research in social constructionism and then introduces my ethnographic methodology. I show how my research fits into dance ethnography and how it could be termed organisational ethnography, present my materials and the methods used to collect and analyse them as well as the ethical issues I encountered during fieldwork. I also cover some of the theory of interaction that has influenced my approach to communication and my reasons for complementing ethnography with a more detailed focus on interaction.

Chapter 4 forms the main body of the thesis and consists of five sections of analysis, each beginning with an illustrative example of interaction during one or the other of my case studies. The examples attempt to give a taste of the complexities, and occasional banality, of everyday interaction in choreographic processes. Section 4.1 offers a general overview of various aspects of communication in the different stages of the choreographic process. I discuss the participants' views of communication, their information needs and preferences, the effect of time pressure on the process, and some of the rules that govern interaction between dancers and choreographers.

Section 4.2 continues with themes from the literature review (ch. 2) by examining the role that dancers play in a choreographer-led creative process. Stressing the importance of an embodied, multimodal definition of interaction I argue that the dancers' silence, prominent in literature and imagination, has perhaps been misinterpreted or overdramatised by some dance scholars, and look for the dancers' creative and interactive agency in their very silence.

Section 4.3 turns the attention to the choreographer's leadership role in choreographic processes. I focus on the choreographer as the visionary instigator of the process, and the main decision-maker in it, but also note that leaders cannot lead without followers. Choreographers depend on dancers for their cooperation as much as dancers rely on choreographers for leadership.

As is becoming evident, the dancer-choreographer relationship is very much an interdependent one. In section 4.4 I ask if it can be called collaborative and by what definition of collaboration. I argue for a more careful definition of terms when discussing working together as "collaboration" and look into one of the main properties of relationships that makes working together possible at all: trust.

Section 4.5 opens up the view from interpersonal relationships to sensemaking in the community of dance-makers. I observe dancers and choreographers as members of communities of practice and shift the focus from the process towards the product by turning my attention to artistic decision-making, with regard to both choreographic and performative decisions.

Finally, in chapter 5 I draw together the conclusions of my analysis and discuss their implications for how dance is viewed as a work environment, and the values and ethics that guide dance-making. I finish by suggesting potential avenues for future research.

## 1.5 Notes for reading

This research project was granted approval by the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 14 September, 2012, before fieldwork began (see Appendix B). This included permission to film the participants during rehearsals and interviews, as detailed in the participant consent form (see Appendix A). I have included in the analysis multiple quotes from interviews, edited slightly for readability and transcribed only at word level, and in a few cases translated from Finnish by the author (see Appendix C for interview questions). There are also quotes from my notebooks, reproduced in the form I have written down at the time, as well as transcriptions of video material, some treated like the interviews, some given a narrative representation and some transcribed in more detail, including some gestures and prosodic characteristics (the symbols used are presented in Appendix D).

Any transcription is always just one interpretation of events and a kind of flattening of modalities. The complications of capturing speech are numerous; the difficulty of accurately representing embodied interaction is enormous. Furthermore, my data is ethnographic, captured in observations, notes and recordings of varying quality. Therefore I want to emphasise that even though I use symbols borrowed from conversation analysis to present some of my data, my transcriptions and my analysis of them are necessarily much less detailed than those of communication scholars in general and conversation analysts in particular.

In the text, the participants are represented by codes that describe the roles they had in the processes I observed (dancer/choreographer in a freelance/repertory company), but it should be noted that the choreographers, as well as the rehearsal director of the second case study, were also experienced dancers, and many of the dancers had at least

some, and in some cases considerable, experience as choreographers/directors. The codes are as follows:

FreeD = freelance dancer,  
PChor = the producer-dancer-choreographer working with the freelance dancers,  
RepD = dancer or apprentice in the repertory company,  
VChor = the visiting choreographer in the repertory company,  
RDir = rehearsal director (in the repertory company).

For the sake of consistency, the processes and their outcomes are referred to according to their mode production as Freelance Production and Repertory Production. My interview questions are prefaced with my initials (TT).

Leadership scholar David Collinson (2005:1431) draws attention to the “embeddedness of masculine assumptions in organizational power relations, identities and practices”. Dance practitioners and critics alike have in recent years expressed their concerns about the gender and ethnic disparity among choreographers in the UK and are seeking ways to diversify programming in dance.<sup>8</sup> Yet by chance and for reasons of accessibility, rather than by choice, I observed only male choreographers. Whenever I am referring to specific events during either process, or to specific interviews, I will therefore use the male pronoun for the choreographer, and choose the pronouns for dancers according to their gender. While gender politics are beyond the scope of this research, I am wary of perpetuating gendered power structures. Were there reasons beyond chance that I ended up observing male choreographers? Did the choreographer’s gender influence their authority and the power dynamics within the

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<sup>8</sup> See for example Luke Jennings’ article “Sexism in dance: where are all the female choreographers?” *The Observer*, 28 April, 2013, Judith Mackrell’s comment on the Guardian dance blog on 12 October, 2015: “How can we give female choreographers a lift? Join Rambert’s debate”, and Jeanne Allen on “The Gender Divide in Ballet Leadership and Choreography”, *Nonprofit Quarterly*, 28 September, 2015.

choreographic process? The answer to both questions is “quite possibly”, but they require further research.

## **2. Dancer-choreographer relations: a literature review**

This chapter introduces the starting point for my research: how dancer-choreographer relations have been defined and presented in dance literature and, to a lesser extent, in organisational studies. Most of the research covered here focuses on modern and contemporary dance, but the influence of classical ballet and ballet studies on how the topic is discussed cannot be ignored, and therefore some analyses of ballet careers (Wulff, 1998; Wainwright et al., 2006) are included. The texts offer different points of view on the roles and rules, contexts and conventions of choreographic practices. Some focus more on dancers, some on choreographers; all present ideas about the relationships between them.

Many of the studies are ethnographic, mainly in the anthropological tradition (Martin, 1990; Novack, 1990; Wulff, 1998; Davida, 2011b; Newell & Fortin, 2011; Vellet, 2011) but there are some sociological approaches (Cope, 1976, Wainwright et al., 2006). Others represent historical (Gardner, 2007), philosophical (McFee, 2011; Parviainen, 1998; Rouhiainen, 2002, 2003, 2008b) and educational (Butterworth, 2009; Lavender, 2009) points of view. Many writers are practitioners turned researchers, or researcher-practitioners (e.g. Roche, 2011; Van Dyke, 1992). They address theoretical and practical issues of identity (particularly with regard to dancers), embodiment, ethics, choreographic methods, dance careers and training. I will also briefly introduce organisational research that employs dance and choreography as a model, method or intervention.

Powerful choreographers and submissive dancers are a recurring theme in much of this literature, as are various strategies for empowering dancers in the creative process. Charting the differences between anthropological and sociological approaches to

dance and the body Thomas (1995:8) comes to the conclusion that anthropology's interest in the "other" has meant that it has paid more attention to both than sociology, which has overlooked dance as an art, as a bodily practice and as an activity that is typically perceived as feminine. It is perhaps this tradition of otherness and marginalisation that to this day makes dancers, choreographers and scholars concerned with empowerment within the field, especially since the relatively recent theoretical (poststructural, postmodern, feminist, postcolonial) interest in the body in society and culture (see Thomas, 1995:18). The dancer's oppressed position is often traced back to ballet culture, so I will start this chapter with a brief introduction to the problem of ballet.

## 2.1 "Programmed in diffidence"? The problem of ballet

The quote in the heading above comes from author and journalist Suzanne Gordon's exploration of professional ballet called *Off Balance: The Real World of Ballet* (1983:15). It is a telling, if somewhat sensationalistic, depiction of ballet as a strictly hierarchical and ethically questionable work environment. Gordon describes an infantilisation and lack of autonomy that starts in the ballet school and continues in professional companies, which according to her are less like workplaces and more like extended families. She expresses concern over ballet dancers' "loss of self" (1983:xviii): dancers are kept in a perpetual childhood of always being told what to do and, in a fiercely competitive environment, are unable to object to institutionalized abuse of power. For Gordon, American ballet companies are rigid hierarchies where the (male) choreographer or artistic director rules as a dictator over his powerless and obedient subjects, the (female) dancers. Gordon's book, even if outdated, is indicative of the way dancer-choreographer relationships have often been described: they are a



problem that has its roots in ballet culture and that needs to be solved by empowering dancers.

Wulff's ethnography of ballet dancers, *Ballet Across Borders: Career and Culture in the World of Dancers* (1998), takes a comprehensive look at the professional world of classical ballet in the Western world through studies in four companies. Her focus is on "the culture and social organization of these companies" (1998:18) on what could be termed a macro level, discussing a wide range of topics from the dancers' daily routines to the "transnational" connections between ballet companies. While many aspects of the ballet dancers' working lives are similar to those of contemporary dancers – the physical exertion, the close-knit relationships between colleagues, the short careers, etc. – Wulff's focus on the peculiarities of ballet culture mean that the connections between her study and mine are rather general.

Wulff (1998:72) shows the ballet choreographer as the creator and decision-maker in the process, but also acknowledges the importance to the performance of the "delicate communication" between the dancer and the choreographer, built on "[m]utual trust, respect and an ability to spark each other through continual exchange". She denies the notion of ballet dancers being oppressed, "that they only do what they are told to do", by giving examples of dancers refusing to do things that hurt them or that they did not like and suggesting changes, and even changing the choreography in performance without consulting the choreographer (Wulff, 1998:73). Wulff uses these examples to show that the dancers have agency both "in the studio and on stage" but gives a fairly restricted sense of "agency" as a mere reaction against instructions, an open or secret act of resistance. Wulff (1998:124) does, however, mention William Forsythe's way of "sharing authorship" with his dancers, and briefly describes one of Forsythe's

processes where the dancers were initially given “freedom to develop their own ideas on choreographing, inserting agency in a shared authorship” while the choreographer “hoped to be inspired by the dancers’ work” (1998:158).

Wulff (1998:89) notes that “in light of modern ideas of personal expression and laws on democracy in the workplace, traditional deference and discipline are increasingly being questioned at the three classical companies in [her] study, but not necessarily changed all that much”. Contemporary dance companies with different traditions and shorter history may be quicker to react to changes in society. What they do share with ballet companies, however, is a kind of office politics that centres on sharing and withholding information. In Wulff’s (1998:98-99) experience it was “common for dancers to complain of not getting enough information about current events and future planning” while not being aware that often the management knew little more than it was giving away at any given moment. Yet rumours circulate, news trickle, and information management is a way of engaging in the politics and power struggles of an organisation.<sup>9</sup>

In their sociologically framed ethnographic study of ballet as social practice, Steven P. Wainwright, Clare Williams and Bryan S. Turner (2006) discuss ballet dancers’ professional identities in relation to Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, demonstrating how dancers’ careers are shaped by their individual, institutional and choreographic habitus. Wainwright et al. (2006:543-544) record that in the Royal

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<sup>9</sup> Wulff (1998:21) also finds that guest choreographers “upset the power dynamics” of ballet companies, causing “tensions that seem to be a necessary part of the process”. Although I do not doubt that power negotiations take place in dance companies, as they would in any organisation with or without visiting or changing personnel, and that choreographic processes are rich ground for tensions to build, I would like to question just how necessary those tensions are for achieving the desired outcome. That conflicts easily happen seems likely, and that contentious processes may nevertheless result in acclaimed productions seems plausible, but is this more than coincidence? We cannot assume causation on anecdotal evidence alone.

Ballet one of the notable changes has been “the increased participation of dancers in decision-making” that some of their interviewees attributed partly to changes in British society. Wulff (1998) notices a similar trend at the Royal Swedish Ballet. It is interesting to note what kinds of decisions the dancers are making: rather than the collective creative processes of contemporary choreography (e.g. Butterworth, 2009, Rouhiainen, 2008a) the ballet ethnographers write about the dancers having more control over their general work conditions – of being asked if they will do something rather than being told to do it, as one of Wainwright et al.’s (2006:544) interviewees puts it.

Wainwright et al. (2006:544) acknowledge the (ballet) choreographer’s dependence on the dancers:

There is a reciprocal relationship between the choreographer’s ideas of what movements he (typically) wants, on how they look on the bodies of the dancers he is inscribing his choreography on, and with how these steps feel for the dancer.

The subject-object divide in this statement is nevertheless clear: the choreographer “wants” and “inscribes”, the dancers are being inscribed on and experience (“feel”) the steps in their bodies. The creative process may be “often inspired and always changed by working with dancers’ bodies” (Wainwright et al., 2006:544) but the choreographer is the one getting inspired while the dancers provide him with bodies to think with.

Discussing how ballet dancers’ careers are shaped, Wainwright et al. (2006:549) raise an important point about power: power within the dance world means being able to decide which dancers’ bodies and abilities “count[] as ‘physical capital’”. With their casting choices, artistic directors and choreographers determine the value and use of a

dancer's body and skills and thus for their part decide the direction of her career. This power is exercised not only before the beginning of a choreographic process but also during it whenever the choreographer makes choices about which dancers to use for which tasks, roles, sections or positions, thus perhaps inadvertently communicating to the dancers her/his perception of their roles in the group.

## 2.2 Modern dance and the difficulty of democracy

Edith Cope's *Performances: Dynamics of a Dance Group* (1976) is a rare early sociologically framed case study of the life span of a project-based modern dance group. Cope focuses on group dynamics: how the dancers, choreographer and other central or peripheral group members from the musician to the administrator come together, work and, at the end of the project, come apart as a group. Cope's research covers issues of recruitment and membership, group identity and cohesion, conflicts, power and authority, etc., and provides insights into the roles and identities of dancers in particular; the choreographer is less present in the text. Cope's observations on dancer-choreographer interaction and the dancers' expectations about the process and the choreographer's leadership are particularly relevant to my research. She discovers, for example, that different training backgrounds (classical vs. modern dance) lead to different initial expectations of what kind of process the dancers are entering and what kind of work they think is worthwhile (e.g. Cope, 1976:26-27). She also notes that dancers prefer different kinds of leadership for different tasks: a somewhat democratic way of organising the work but "a decisively authoritarian approach in training classes" (Cope, 1976:161). These elements of group dynamics appear and are negotiated through social interaction, which makes Cope's observations a useful point of comparison to my analysis.

*Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture*, Cynthia Novack's "ethnographic history" (1990:3) of contact improvisation in America, situates the development and practice of contact improvisation within a wider societal framework. Many of Novack's observations on community and culture are relevant to my project, not least because some of the values of egalitarianism upheld by contact improvisers seem to be related to the ideas dancers and dance-makers hold about collaboration in contemporary dance (see chapter 4.4). Novack (1990:198) describes this ideology as follows:

Democracy and freedom are respected as artistic rights embodied in contact improvisation, and even free enterprise is accepted on the grounds that, after all, everyone may do as he or she wishes. At the same time, the nature of the improvisational process maintains equality.

Novack goes on to quote Steve Paxton, who emphasises the equality inherent in improvisational dance forms. In Paxton's words (cited in Novack, 1990:198), "[i]mprovisation allows dancers to keep their motive, rather than turning it over to a choreographer. [...] Or you could say, the motive is handed over to an equal, not a master. It's more like a conversation". This view reflects issues of authority and authorship in the dancer-choreographer relationship particularly in situations where improvisation is used either in performance or to produce material in rehearsals, as well as when dancers are asked to compose phrases for the piece. Contact improvisation may seem to side-step some of these status differences, but as Novack (1990:208-209) notes, it is by no means a practice free of hierarchies: those wanting to make a living out of contact improvisation need to engage with the organisational structures of the professional dance world, and even those dancing socially will find that implicit hierarchies form in their dance communities based on different levels of skill.

Novack relates challenges and changes in the contact improvisation movement to those faced by other dance and arts organisations. She notes that there were “other attempts at communal organization in the ‘60s and 70’s” (1990:222) but that these collectives, like contact improvisation companies trying to establish a professional practice, faced “pressures [from] outside structures” to conform to the demands of various funding bodies to provide evidence of structure and organisation in order to receive grants. Furthermore, as Novack (1990:226) states, “if one must market one’s work in order to make a living, that market exerts a powerful, often conservatizing influence on the dancing”. Novack (1990:226-227) also explains how the introduction of government funding of the arts in America in the 1960s changed the organisation of work within the professional dance field by enabling the creation of a few fully employed companies and many more project-based ones and encouraging the establishment of organisational structures; later cuts to arts funding led to the downfall of many of these organisations and fierce competition for resources between the survivors. As Novack demonstrates, the world of professional dance is dependent on the world at large: the need to make a living necessitates adopting and conforming to structures and practices of those that can provide funding.

Jan Van Dyke, in her study *Modern Dance in a Postmodern World: An Analysis of Federal Arts Funding and its Impact on the Field of Modern Dance* (1992), echoes the sentiments of Gordon (1983) above (see 2.1). She expresses concern over dancers’ “lack of verbal confidence” and their “passive acceptance [...] of professional situations which are sometimes inhumane” (1992:104). She claims that professional dancers may be treated almost like children by their teachers and choreographers and attributes the dancers’ passivity to their intensive training that values technical

excellence over uniqueness and creativity. Painting a picture of dancers as silent, obedient choreographer's pawns, she asks:

As bodies are trained to be disciplined and obedient instruments, skilled at following directions, accustomed to taking correction, working silently to become a vehicle for another person's ideas, are minds trained in the same way?

(Van Dyke, 1992:105)

Van Dyke (1992:121) suggests that the dancers' ingrained practice of unquestioning followership may be partly the reason why "dance now follows the market rather than taking the lead in determining its own direction". Much has happened in the past twenty-five years, in commercially oriented as well as experimental contemporary dance, dance education, and dancers' working conditions. Choreographers such as Siobhan Davies have purposefully set out to dismantle what Van Dyke (1992:123) calls the "usual social structure" in the dance field, characterised by an "autocrat" surrounded by "a group of disciples". Yet echoes of Van Dyke's worries about lack of democracy remain and are the subject of ethical discussions within the field and inside choreographic processes such as my case studies. On the one hand, surely a choreographer is allowed to work according to her artistic vision; on the other hand, we expect dancers to be treated as subjects and individuals rather than the choreographer's playthings.

### 2.3 Dancing together: relations of production in modern dance

Sally Gardner (2007) questions the validity of established notions about the roles of dancer and choreographer in the making of modern dance. She analyses how three prominent modern dance scholars (Susan Leigh Foster, 1986, 1997; Amy Koritz, 1995; Randy Martin, 1990) have conceptualised "the relations of production between

the choreographer and the dancer in the modern dance group” and how they may have at times failed to recognise “an intersubjective/intercorporeal relationship of dance-making between the dancer and the choreographer” (Gardner, 2007:51). It is the manifestations of these “relations of production”<sup>10</sup> in interaction that I am interested in.

Gardner concentrates on modern dance; she does not argue that there is a general misconception about dancer-choreographer relationships but rather that the particularities of modern dance, where the roles of dancer and choreographer may be different from those in ballet, are not fully or accurately represented in scholarly writing. Her point is essentially about differences in choreographic methods and practices: what was different about modern dance-making was that “the dancer and the choreographer danced together” (Gardner, 2007:36). Many modern dance choreographers started out by creating solos for themselves and after progressing to group works had to find a way to transmit their idiosyncratic movement to other dancers (Gardner, 2007:36-37).<sup>11</sup> Based on Koritz’s (1995) work on how early solo-practitioners of modern dance “contradicted modernist expectations of a separation and binarisation between authorship and performance,” Gardner (2007:39-41) asks whether the birth of modern dance groups reintroduced “a division of labour between dancing and choreography”. She answers in the negative, explaining how the lack of discussion about the dancing choreographer of modern dance is in part due to a failure

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<sup>10</sup> Gardner (2007:37) uses the concept of relations of production “to suggest a concern with the levels both of social institutions and processes and the intercorporeal/intersubjective relationships within which dances get made”.

<sup>11</sup> This, again, is a different proposition to the “dancing together” of improvisational and collective methods of dance-making as discussed in the context of contemporary dance.



to recognise the authorship of female performers who were primarily known as performers.

As to Susan Leigh Foster's studies of choreographic practices and dancer training in modern dance, Gardner (2007) argues that she fails to acknowledge the intimacy of the modern dancer's training in particular techniques one-to-one or in a small group with the choreographer who developed that technique rather than in an impersonal training class for a large group of dancers. Foster's analysis "represses the intimacy" of dance-making relationships in modern dance that existed before the "institutionalising" of techniques such as Martha Graham's or Merce Cunningham's and "implies that all kinds of dance are produced according to the same mode of production" (Gardner, 2007:43). Gardner (2007:44-45) also criticises Foster's view of the modern dancer as an isolated entity, an "object-body" with no possibility of "an affective relation with the choreographer or her body in 'making' the dancer". What Foster does not consider is that "[t]he formation of a dancer took place in a specific relationship, not simply in a technical regime" (Gardner, 2007:46).

Randy Martin (1990), on the other hand, wants to demonstrate the agency of the dancers despite the restraints placed on them by the choreographer but does so "at the cost of the body of the choreographer": [t]he emancipation of [the dancers] is secured through the eclipse of the choreographer and denial that she might have a *dancing* presence" (Gardner, 2007:47; emphasis original). Martin constructs an opposition between the mind of the choreographer and the body of the dancer and, according to Gardner (2007:49), fails to see the potential connections between the two: "[t]he choreographer is someone who speaks [...] but mainly to show language's externality to the dance. The possibility that her voice might constitute for the dancers an

important bodily presence, for example, is not considered”. Gardner (2007:50) charges Martin with being so “committed beforehand to the idea of a *transfer* of authority” that “he cannot accept the *co-existence* of unequal authority and knowledge – and relations of dependence where the agency of the dancers survives the naming of the work as that of the choreographer”. Gardner argues, then, that the roles of dancer and choreographer in modern dance can be separate yet intimate.

Van Dyke (1992) touches on dancer-choreographer relations in her research on the impact of federal arts funding on modern dance in the USA. She writes that the members of the Judson Dance Theater, active in the 1960s and 1970s, “rejected the hierarchy typical of dance companies and made all important decisions by consensus” (1992:16) – a principle that was lost once money entered the picture and some members found ways to make a living with their work. Van Dyke worries about the “pervasive sense of dance as a competitive realm” and “the imposition of business ethics on the arts” which, according to her, “reinforce the hierarchical relations of the ballet world while discouraging the traditional modern dance values of freedom, risk-taking, and a subjective reinterpretation of form” (1992:120).

## 2.4 Towards “dance artist practitioners”: an educational point of view

Jo Butterworth (2002, 2009) offers an educational perspective into democracy in choreographic processes. In her doctoral dissertation she presents a “Didactic-Democratic Continuum Model” for teaching choreography in higher education. The model names five different types of choreographic process, each defining a particular role that the choreographer can adopt in relation to the dancers as well as a

corresponding role for the dancers.<sup>12</sup> As the name of the model suggests, the processes range from what Butterworth (2009:178) terms “didactic” and “traditional” to “democratic” processes characterised by “co-ownership”. Although she recognises the value of didactic approaches (processes 1 & 2 in the model) to some aspects of choreography, Butterworth emphasises the educational usefulness of choreographic processes that she terms “dance devising”, i.e. processes where “roles and responsibilities are shared” and “[p]erhaps by collaborative methods, or through collective decision-making processes, the creation of dance as art is attempted by more than one artist” (2009:189; processes 3, 4 and 5 in the model). In accordance with other writers who favour artistic collaboration she sees it as a means of achieving a “sharpening of problem-solving skills and accompanying discoveries” that goes beyond the abilities of a single artist (Butterworth, 2009:191). According to Butterworth (2009:190), the “central premise” of dance devising is “that participants engage with, and contribute to, the various stages of the choreographic process [...] and this may be in partnership with a choreographer”. To me it seems, however, that as participants in a choreographic process dancers engage with and contribute to the process regardless of the type of process. Their contributions vary but even if their task is to learn and perform movements devised by the choreographer, they are still a crucial part of the process.

Butterworth’s model is designed for educating “dance artist practitioners”, versatile dance professionals who can meet the varying demands of the job market and find work as dancers, choreographers and teachers alike (2002:313; 2009:178). This is both a reaction to the changes in the dance world towards more fluid roles for dancers and

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<sup>12</sup> The five potentially overlapping processes define the choreographer-dancer relationship as that of 1) expert and instrument, 2) author and interpreter, 3) pilot and contributor, 4) facilitator and creator, and 5) two co-owners (Butterworth, 2009:178).

choreographers (see Butterworth, 2009:182-183) and a part of it, as the dance students educated in this model presumably will expect it to be relevant to their professional careers. Butterworth (2002) offers brief case study descriptions to illustrate the different processes but does not elaborate on how choreographers make choices about which methods to use or when to change tack. She remarks on the importance of social interaction and mentions that the type of interaction varies according to the type of process but gives fairly superficial accounts of the different interaction types, mainly stating that the interaction in didactic processes is characterised by receptivity whereas more democratic processes require more interactivity (Butterworth, 2002:222-223, 242, 250, 255, 261, 268). My research is designed to analyse what these descriptions of social interaction actually mean. Butterworth's model is, by definition, prescriptive; my aim is to analyse social interaction in choreographic processes, describe the patterns found and see what categories might form.

Larry Lavender (2009) offers another analysis of choreographic processes from an educational perspective, explaining how a facilitator may benefit the process. He emphasises the choreographer's role as a decision-maker who has to continually "address both planned and unforeseen challenges" which cover all aspects of the work and which can rarely be solved with "routine 'fixes'" (Lavender, 2009:71). Lavender claims that many choreographers are unaware of their decision-making processes and need help to become aware of and break free from their habitual patterns in order to "do their best" (2009:72). His is a clearly choreographer-focused view, where the "choreographer's intentions [...] set the creative wheels in motion" and where his actions structure the process (Lavender, 2009:73).<sup>13</sup> Lavender gives examples of how

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<sup>13</sup> Lavender (2009:72-73) identifies four main "operations" that choreographers make use of: improvisation, development, evaluation and assimilation.

a facilitator may help the choreographer clarify and develop his various intentions, choices during the process (“creative process mentoring”) and interactions with the dancers (“rehearsal criticism”), as well as prompt him to try alternative versions of the dance (“choreographic provocation”).

The choreographer is in charge of managing the dancers’ “time, energy, and tolerances for uncertainty” as well as “inspir[ing] dancers to give their best” (Lavender, 2009:78). While this certainly rings true, it is a rather one-sided depiction of interaction in a choreographic process. What responsibilities do the dancers have? How do they relate to the choreographer, or to a facilitator? How do their actions influence the choreographer’s intentions and choices? Lavender assigns agency to the choreographer and to the external facilitator but does not discuss the possibility that other people involved in the process, including the dancers, might also have a facilitating function. In contrast, Butterworth (2009:189) suggests that training in certain kinds of choreographic processes can help the dancers identify “appropriate facilitation skills, comprehending and contributing to the choreographer’s intentions”.

Butterworth suggests that, since such processes make the dancers’ contributions more visible and imply their shared ownership of the work, dance devising could “lead to further emancipation of dancers from the shackles of tradition” (2009:192). Yet Butterworth notes that her model enables the choreographer to make “conscious decisions about the appropriateness of an approach at a particular point in time, depending on the context, the participant needs, and the intended outcome” (2009:186). She acknowledges, then, that the choreographer as a decision-maker is, typically, in a position of power in the choreographic process, and wishes, at least occasionally, to free the dancers from their subjugated position, although at the

discretion of the choreographer. Questions of power and particularly the empowerment of dancers have been the subject of much dance scholarship, briefly outlined in this section.

## 2.5 Careers and professional identities

Inspired by Kealiinohomoku, Dena Davida pursues ethnography in her own dance environment of contemporary dance and has edited a collection of ethnography in the “art worlds of dance”, *Fields in Motion: Ethnography in the Worlds of Dance* (2011), which includes among others Pamela Newell and Sylvie Fortin’s article on “choreographer-dancer relational dynamics during the creative process”, a study with close associations with my research.

Davida (2011b:34) draws attention to the multiplicity of participant roles involved in bringing about a contemporary dance event: not only audience members, artists and critics but also

theatre technicians, rehearsal directors, professional visual and sound designers, arts programmers, publicists, production managers and administrators [...], ‘dance *animateurs*,’ members of boards of directors, summer workshop students, funding agents and cultural policy-makers, tour managers, a community of artistic peers, and more.

This variety of participants coming together to produce an event is probably a factor in the perception of performing arts processes as collaborative enterprises. Davida (2011b:34) notes that “this kind of dance event is commonly understood by its practitioners as choreographer-centric, for without the dancemaker’s creative vision the dance wouldn’t materialize” but also observes that all the different kinds of

participants contribute significantly to the final outcome.<sup>14</sup> Although my research is limited to choreographers and dancers (and one rehearsal director), this give-and-take between a central vision and participant contribution is at the heart of much of the interaction taking place in a choreographic process. Vellet characterises the dancer's position as one of trained obedience on the one hand and a kind of cooperative otherness on the other hand:

The creation of a danced gesture falls above and beyond the province of aesthetics, because it is permeated with questions about ethics. If dance can be perceived as a possible site for strong discipline, from which emerges the notion of "the docile body," it is also a place of openness and the construction of an identity, of a certain otherness, to which the choreographer contributes.  
(Vellet, 2011:221)

Related to both the emancipation project discussed above and the need to understand what being a body for a living means to the dancer, dance scholars have created and adapted concepts to describe the dancer's work identity. Particularly influential in the discussion about the identity of the contemporary dancer has been Foster's (1997:253) notion of "the hired body" trained in several techniques. "Uncommitted to any specific aesthetic vision, it is a body for hire: it trains in order to make a living at dancing," Foster (1997:255) writes. She admits that normative ideas about dancers' bodies are nothing new, yet laments the way "the multipurpose hired body subsumes and smooths over differences" (Foster, 1997:256). Roche (2011), on the other hand, takes this idea of versatile dance training to herald the opportunity for greater individuality.

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<sup>14</sup> Davida (2011b:38) gives a brief description of the creative process she observed for her dissertation. Interestingly, she says it is "[t]ypical of the contemporary dance genre" for these processes to "unfold[] in orderly stages" from initial ideas to fundraising, creative sessions to final shaping and addition of image, sound and costumes. While I agree that certain stages seem to be common to many choreographic projects, I hesitate at the word "orderly". Most rehearsals take place before performance and grant applications need to be written before grants may be received, but many other stages seem to overlap and weave in and out of focus, even in the dance-making itself: cleaning an already finished section may be accompanied by creating new material for another, for example.

Roche (2011) speaks of (independent contemporary) dancers' moving identities, Wainwright et al. (2006) of different forms of habitus and Parviainen (1998) of "paths" but all refer essentially to the same thing: the dancer's past training and work experiences, her whole embodied history, all contribute to her identity as a dancer. Parviainen (1998:129-130) draws attention to the aspect of personal choice in dancers' training and career paths:

A dancer and a choreographer acquire knowledge of movement gradually in the process of doing dance work; thus, they cannot possess knowledge and skills of the moving body immediately, only through the path of practising dance. This implies that the dancer's personal knowledge is a path, developed and formed gradually during her/his career. As a path, the dancer's knowledge is also a personal choice, a project to learn a certain movement vocabulary and to habituate the body to this vocabulary, studying and living through it.

In a similar way, Roche's (2011) "moving identity" describes the influence that the independent contemporary dancer's accumulated training and choreographic experiences have on her individual way of moving<sup>15</sup> and explores how this moving identity influences the choreographic process. She includes in the concept "the orientation of the dancer as a gendered, socially and culturally located subject" (Roche, 2011:112), which suggests that the moving identity also affects social interaction within the choreographic process. The choreographer has a moving identity as well, and there is reciprocity in the dancer-choreographer relationship: both "have the potential to influence each other's moving identities" (Roche, 2011:114). Roche (2011:115) sees training that allows dancers to realise their individuality through building their dance technique around their unique bodily capabilities as a good preparation "to have a dynamic relationship to movement that can then be transferred to creative work with a choreographer". For Roche, allowing and encouraging

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Wainwright et al. (2006) on the ballet dancer's habitus.



individuality in technique is a way of promoting the dancer's agency in relation to the choreographer. She does note that people in the dance world often understand that the dancer-choreographer relationship is "creatively collaborative" even if the marketing of dance is still focused on the choreographer as the author of work, but calls for more acknowledgement of the dancer as a *creative* participant in the choreographic process.

Wainwright et al. (2006:536-537) separate individual, institutional and "choreographic" aspects of dancer identity. For them, "[h]abitus is the outcome of the sedimentation of past experiences, shaping the agents' perceptions and actions of the present and future and thereby moulding their social practices". Briefly put, "individual habitus" refers to the dancer's "physical capital", that is, the advantages and limitations of her body;<sup>16</sup> "institutional habitus" is acquired through daily training in particular (ballet) schools and companies; "choreographic status" has to do with "rehearsing and performing in a certain style" (Wainwright et al., 2006:538, 540, 545). Each habitus influences the other ones, sometimes strengthening them, sometimes working against them.

Although the role of institutions may be stronger in ballet than in the contemporary dance field, the notion of institutional habitus is relevant to my research. The dancers and rehearsal directors who had been longest with the Repertory Company expressed an awareness of themselves as the current baton bearers and guardians of the company's reputation. This reputation seemed less dependent on the dancers having certain types of bodies or being proficient in particular techniques than it did in the ballet companies mentioned by Wainwright et al. (2006), and was perhaps more to do

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<sup>16</sup> Wainwright et al. (2006:538) note how ballet dancers' careers may be defined by their physical attributes.

with a certain ethos that the senior dancers (by years in the company rather than age) saw as their duty to instil in the newcomers. As Wainwright et al (2006:542) point out, a high turnover of dancers and especially a heterogeneous intake of new dancers may dilute a company's institutional habitus. Contemporary dancers are likely to have more varied training backgrounds than ballet dancers, but some awareness of an institutional common denominator was evident in my interviews and, to a lesser extent, in rehearsal studio interaction.

Pamela Newell and Sylvie Fortin's (2011) study of "choreographer-dancer relational dynamics" in a choreographic workshop setting has much in common with Butterworth's research into choreographic processes in that they, too, are interested in the "dancer's evolving status" and potential empowerment in the professional dance field (2011:191-192). However, whereas Butterworth takes as her starting point the choreographer's choice between different approaches, Newell and Fortin focus on how those choices and choreographer-dancer relationships on the whole "have an impact on dancers' physical, psychological, and even vocational health" (2011:192). They provide a four-role continuum model of dancers' roles that ranges from traditional to decentred and much resembles Butterworth's five-process model. The dancer's possible roles are identified as executant, interpreter, participant and improviser. The choreographer's roles are not named. At the traditional end of the continuum the dancer is treated as an object, there is a clear hierarchy and the choreographer is the sole authority; in the decentred model the dancer is a subject, relationships are non-hierarchical and authority is shared (Newell & Fortin, 2011:195).

Newell and Fortin (2011:200) make the powerful position of the choreographer very clear: the "compositional practices" adopted in a creative process are "the nexus

between choreographer and dancer, between power and body” and their relationship in essence consists of “the choreographer’s direction and dancer’s response”. They define these practices by their goals: “to prepare or prime” the body without the intention of generating material; “to generate or instigate” movement material in the dancers’ bodies; and “to evolve through construction/deconstruction” material that already exists (Newell & Fortin, 2011:201). They then identify various rehearsal activities and their component parts as serving one of the three main goals. Newell and Fortin (2011:203) explain how the activities as such do not determine the role of the dancer: pre-constructed movement sequences can be employed in such a way as to cast the dancer as an executant but may also be used as a foundation for the dancer’s choices as an interpreter. They do link some features of compositional practices to particular dancer roles, though: a high level of detail in the choreographer’s demonstration or instruction and efforts to create a very particular movement style called for an executant role; formal (vs. expressive) prompts to improvise and goals to develop material cast the dancer as an interpreter; priming activities and expressive improvisation prompts were related to a participant role (Newell & Fortin, 2011:207).

Newell and Fortin (2005:205) note the importance of trust between choreographer and dancer and relate it to activities that “recognize[] the dancers’ individual uniqueness” by giving them more choice and the possibility to engage with the choreographer as equals. Mutual respect and a certain degree of autonomy make the dancer more “willing to open up”, as one of Newell and Fortin’s interviewees puts it. The wider the dancer’s “margin of choice”, the more she is like a participant in a process rather than an executant of orders and the more she is able to engage in a “personal discernment process”, considering “aesthetic, somatic-health, and socio-political factors” in her response to the choreographer’s direction (Newell & Fortin, 2011:208). Yet the

dancers in Newell & Fortin's (2011:209-210) study also reported a trained submissiveness in relation to the choreographer, and difficulties, for instance, in protecting their well-being while serving the choreographer's vision.

Newell and Fortin (2011:211) essentially call for more power to the dancers:

The interview participants are both more willing and better positioned to contribute to the creative process when compositional practices acknowledge their voice and give them access to personal choice; however, they recognize a tendency to censor their own behaviour because of past, repressive training and/or work experience.

Much like Butterworth, Newell and Fortin hope that awareness of different kinds of choreographic practices and their corresponding roles will improve dancers' work experiences. They suggest further research into strategies that could make the different roles more "viable, non-threatening working option[s]" (Newell & Fortin, 2011:212). A study of interaction may reveal that dancers already have such strategies beyond being able to recognise their own preferences and how they relate to their current work situations.

As mentioned by Gardner (2007), Randy Martin is particularly focused on the idea of the dancer as an agent and the dancers collectively, gradually taking over the choreographic process. They are able to do this because of the essential part they play in the dance coming into existence in performance:

Dancers contribute another element of variability to the choreographic process. No matter what the division of labor in the making of a dance, a strict separation between the conception and execution of movement is rare. In the creation of anything, but especially dance, conception is carried by execution.

(Martin, 1990:92)

The choreography does not exist without the dancer because it can only be inscribed on “moving bodies in space” (Martin, 1995:109). The dancer’s power and agency lie in her experiential role in the performance of the dance conceived by the choreographer and consumed by the audience (Martin, 1990:83). Crucially, for Martin (1990:86), the experience of performing is had by “a collective social body” of dancers that gradually secures its position as “totality eclipses authority in the move from conceiver to consumer” during the choreographic process and the dancers “achieve[] their own means of regulation”.

As Gardner (2007) notes, Martin almost dismisses the choreographer out of hand. Others are more in tune with the reciprocity and gradations of the dancer-choreographer relationship which, according to Parviainen (1998:162), “may vary from a mere instrumental attitude to the dancer’s body to a mutual collaborating process as an intimate embodied dialogue”. Parviainen (1998:96) comments on the “hierarchy of legitimacy” inherent in the professional dance (or any other) field:

Practising dance as a profession, having an identity as a dancer, and acquiring a position in the dance field, the dancer has to be recognised by the other agents in the field. ‘Technical’ competence depends fundamentally on social competence and on the corresponding sense of being entitled and required by status to exercise this specific capacity, and therefore to possess it. One can never entirely escape from the hierarchy of legitimacy.

She further notes the “rigidly hierarchical social system” of ballet companies, a hierarchy that modern and contemporary dance “have sought to disestablish” (Parviainen, 1998:105).<sup>17</sup> According to Parviainen, dancers are the underdog in this hierarchy: they have been trained to move rather than to think or speak and to be the

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<sup>17</sup> It is interesting to note how dance (classical ballet) has transformed from “one of the few areas in public life which afforded women an opportunity for selfexpression and for some limited social advancement” (Thomas, 1995:4) into what is often described as a repressive regime of objectification of dancers’ bodies.

skilled but silent instrument of the teacher or choreographer who makes all the decisions on her behalf, resulting in the stereotype of the “dumb” dancer (Parviainen, 1998:106-107; Van Dyke, 1992).<sup>18</sup> Dancers are socialised into discipline and obedience, Parviainen (1998:107) claims. Amongst all the rules and restrictions dancers need to “find techniques and a movement vocabulary through which they can fulfil their potentials as moving bodies” (Parviainen, 1998:113).

Leena Rouhiainen’s phenomenologically oriented doctoral dissertation (2003) includes discussion about the roles and relationships of freelance contemporary dancers and choreographers. It is apparent that choreographers are in a position of power towards dancers, for instance through their casting preferences while a freelance dancer needs to adapt to many different kinds of expectations in order to gain employment (Rouhiainen, 2003:240-241). The choreographer has the responsibility of “orchestrating” both the process and the people in it (Rouhiainen, 2003:255). Rouhiainen (2003:261) discusses collaboration and the importance of openness in the dancer-choreographer relationship but notes that “[d]espite the increasing practice of co-authored dance pieces [...], most commonly it is the choreographer who makes the final decisions on how a piece of dance is structured and what kinds of routines a dancer performs”. Indeed, according to Rouhiainen (2003:264-265), dancers may find it crucial for doing their job well to “surrender” to the choreographer’s vision, to give the choreographer the use of their skills. Dancers are material that the choreographer needs to be able to fulfil his intentions. In return, the dancer needs the choreographer’s “evaluative and prescriptive commentary” (Rouhiainen, 2003:267) to understand the

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<sup>18</sup> While I do not wish to say that there is no truth in accounts of the subjugation of dancers, I was frequently told by participants in my research and other people in the field that they did not recognise the figure of a “silent dancer” from their present-day experiences in the dance studio.

work and her place in it. Rouhiainen (2003:269-270) emphasises that this reciprocal relationship should be ethically sound:

I take the relation and communication of the dancer and the choreographer, at least in some ways, to need an intimate embodied or ethical dialogue in which the alterity or the difference of the other is recognized and appreciated. This includes recognizing both the difference between the roles a dancer and a choreographer are enacting and the particular manner in which individual dancers and choreographers do so.

Rouhiainen (2002) has searched for ethical ways to encounter otherness in the dancer-choreographer relationship in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. She explains that since subjectivity is, in essence, intersubjective, and because meaning is dialogical, we cannot assign meaning to our existence and activities by ourselves (2002:43). Since self-expression and self-realisation through dance were among the aims of the professional dancers Rouhiainen interviewed for her study and since these meanings are intersubjective, the relationship between a dancer and a choreographer becomes an important site for the dancer's identity (2002:44). For this reason it is important that their relationship is one of ethical dialogue where both parties are willing to encounter the other (Rouhiainen, 2002:43-44).

Rouhiainen's interviewees depict the choreographer as an initiator of the work and as the person who has to take responsibility for it; the dancer's task is to dance the work that the choreographer envisions (2002:46-47). The dancer is the choreographer's instrument who should be able to place her creativity at the choreographer's disposal but to do that she needs her individuality to be recognised by the choreographer (Rouhiainen, 2003:48-49). While the choreographer's seems to take priority over the dancers, Rouhiainen (2002:50) finds evidence in her material of choreographers' willingness to encounter difference and readiness to adapt to it. She notes that sometimes ethical dialogue, the kind that according to Merleau-Ponty has to do with

“equality, solidarity, reciprocity, responsibility, recognition and freedom” (Rouhiainen, 2002:45), is not always possible or even desirable in choreographic processes (2002:50). When it is possible, talking is one way of expressing viewpoints and thus promoting ethical dialogue (Rouhiainen, 2002:53). There is a problem with talking in rehearsals, however, in that it takes time away from dancing. Furthermore, Rouhiainen (2002:52-53) repeats the common views about the dancers’ traditional, trained silence, which gets in the way of reciprocity in talking about the work. She suggests that in order for the dancer and choreographer to have an ethical encounter they might temporarily set aside any preconceived ideas about the nature of their relationship and forget the goals of the choreographic process in favour of opening up to one another and becoming their whole selves (Rouhiainen, 2002:54).

An advocate of “an acknowledgement of the significance of the dancer’s role in the creation of independent contemporary dance”, Jenny Roche (2011:105-106) calls for “new definitions of the divisions of labour in choreographic practice” that will change the balance of power in the choreographic process by recognising the dancer “as a self-reflective and creative entity”. She seeks philosophical solutions for the problem of “the silent dancer” in need of “finding empowerment and agency” (Roche, 2011:112). Roche (2011:106) emphasises the change in dance-making practices brought about by “[t]he emergence of the independent dancer, who operates outside a company structure and canonical dance styles”, although presumably the new ways of dance-making and the new kinds of dance-makers are inextricably linked. Furthermore, as in one of my case studies, a repertory company may employ dancers and choreographers from varying backgrounds and produce work where this multiplicity of identities and techniques is present and even encouraged.



Sarah Whatley's (2005) analysis of choreographer Siobhan Davies' revisions of her work reveals a choreographer who is very much concerned with dancers' agency, subjectivity and ownership of the dance. For Davies, the revival process is not simply about new dancers learning an existing piece as it was once performed. Rather, the "dancers' individual and collective embodied practices provides [sic] the starting point for Davies' revival process" (Whatley, 2005:88). Davies is interested in how the dancers "can make the dance 'their own'" and prefers to give the new dancers "the same process as the first dancers", which can lead to a revival that is very different from the original (Whatley, 2005:90-91). Davies comes across as a choreographer who is very interested in her dancers' "individual habitus" (cf. Wainwright et al., 2006) as dancers:

Davies' choreographic method invites dancers to bring their personal qualities to the dance, to encourage each individual to find convincing, 'real' movement that they own, rather than having movement imposed upon them. The dancers are thus encouraged to contribute to how the dance emerges, the shape and the meaning. Each dancer has a different body weight and musculature, and a different way of using the body, so each role is deliberately particular to each dancer.

(Whatley, 2005:91)

Whatley's language reveals a very different approach to the dancer-choreographer power relationship from that described by Wainwright et al. (2006). The dancers are "invited" and "encouraged", they "own" material and are not "imposed upon". They are "individuals" with "personal qualities" and rather than ask them to adapt to the choreography, Davies adapts the choreography for them. According to Whatley (2005:92), a role can even be so particular to a certain dancer that Davies would not recreate it with another dancer, which goes against the common notion of dancers' replaceability.

## 2.6 Authorship and artistry

For Graham McFee (2011), the roles of dancer and choreographer are clearly separate. The choreographer is the “author of the dancework’s *meaning*,” a meaning that “flows from the choreographer’s decisions” and is related to the choreographer’s intentions (McFee, 2011:147, 134). While McFee (2011:149) acknowledges that “much of the creation [of a dance] is done in the rehearsal room” and that the dancers’ limitations, strengths and weaknesses influence the choices available to the choreographer, for him the dancer is primarily a performer rather than a creator. Should the process of creating or performing choreography involve improvisation the dancer can of course make some creative choices, but McFee emphasises that even then the authorship remains with the choreographer. This is because in McFee’s definition being an artist (author) is characterised by the power to make decisions, for example about constraints on the dancer’s improvisation (what the task is, when it is over, what will happen to the material).<sup>19</sup> Crucially,

the work comes about when the artist (who may be the composer [in jazz; choreographer in dance], or the whole ensemble) decides that the work is finished – at least for the moment. And that decision incorporates into the work whatever contributions have been made [by] performers.  
(McFee, 2011:161)

This is why McFee does not want to call dancers “artists”. Even when dancers provide movement material for the choreography, “the choreographer decides – the responsibility remains with the choreographer” (McFee, 2011:171). The choreographer’s job is to make decisions and take responsibility for them. This job

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<sup>19</sup> McFee identifies four types of improvisation: improvisation can be used to create movement material that will be set, performed in passages within an otherwise composed work or on its own but guided by a structure, or the whole work may in some rare cases be improvised (even then constrained by a notion of context) (see 2011:154-160).

may be shared between several people, including dancers, but in that case the dancers become choreographers; their role as dancers is still to “instantiate” the dance, to perform it, rather than to initiate or author it (McFee, 2011:172-173). McFee emphasises the importance of the dancers’ role (“dancers *are* the dance”), their subjectivity and agency, and wants to “*rightly* value the dancer” (2011:167, 183-184, 174; emphasises original). This value, the dancer’s contribution, lies in his/her “craft-mastery” of “instantiating the dance – from the score, or from the choreographer’s instructions, or whatever” (McFee, 2011:169). Although the dancer’s craft-mastery can be virtuosic and his/her performance “definitive”, McFee does not leave her/him much room to be a reflexive individual: “the dance is principally composed of the bodies of dancers in motion” rather than any performance intention they might have (McFee, 2011:180, 168). Furthermore, it is irrelevant to the audience what the dancers feel: “if they [dancers] think they are behaving in ways appropriate to ensemble, we only care if they *are* doing so” (McFee, 2011:179).

McFee draws his examples largely from classical ballet and it is conceivable that contemporary choreographic processes and performances might challenge some of his ideas, but the notion of artistry as decision-making resonates with other writers who talk about the choreographer as a decision-maker. Even though they may note, as McFee does, that the choreographer’s decisions are not independent of the dancers’ actions, there is no question that he is *responsible* for them. But what exactly is the contribution of the dancers to decision-making in choreographic processes?

The need to define dancers as artists – or dancers as non-artists – seems to stem from two sources. Firstly, there are our contemporary conceptions of what art is. Stephanie Z. Dudek (2011:52-53) writes that “by the early twentieth century innovation had

begun to replace beauty as the criterion of creative worth” and that “there was a need to turn to personal sources as the raw material of artistic creation”. It is not hard to see why contemporary dancers would want their “creative worth” or artistry acknowledged in processes where they are given the task of innovation, of creating their own material, and, as my interviewees reported, sometimes asked by choreographers to draw on their personal life experiences for creating that material. Secondly, there is the way contemporary dancers are trained. They are taught choreography, they are asked to make work on themselves and their peers. Inasmuch as Thomson (2011:344) is correct in stating that “[c]horeographers are first trained as dancers,” it makes sense to give dancers an educational means to pursue a choreographic career. It would then seem strange to deny them the resulting identity as creators/innovators/artists once they have finished their education and entered the profession as dancers. Yet philosophers of art can put forward a compelling case against dancers as artists by defining artistic agency as decision-making:

the individuality of seeing is irrevocable, and the artist in the process of creating in a highly idiosyncratic and dynamic way makes the individuating decisions. Moreover, it is not clear how and when such decisions and choices are made, but it appears they are made by the intentionality of the artist.  
(Dudek, 2011:56.)

This emphasis on decisions and choices combined with the role of the choreographer as the designated decision-maker in choreographic processes seems to put artistry firmly in the hands of the choreographer. Whether dancers should be thought of as artists then depends on whether we think of application of innovation/creativity/expressivity or control over how they are used and presented as the primary criterion of artistry. If we follow Wollheim (1991:40-41) and focus on a work of art having a singular meaning, “fixed by the fulfilled intentions of the artist” – “fulfilled” meaning that the work caused “in a suitably sensitive, suitably informed

spectator the appropriate experiences” – we see a connection to the vision (intention) of the choreographer. The artist-choreographer’s vision is a mission statement and the success or fulfilment of that vision is judged by the audience’s experiences. The dancers may also have intentions and the choreographer may be influenced by them – and the dancers may be very persuasive and the choreographer very open to influences – but it was clear from my interviews that the initial impetus for the work tends to come from the choreographer.<sup>20</sup>

## 2.7 Notes on embodiment

In a scholarly field much preoccupied with the position of the body in culture and society and in which dancers are routinely metonymically referred to as bodies, issues of embodiment deserve some discussion. The juxtaposition of the unthinking body of the dancer against the speaking mind of the choreographer has its roots in the body-mind divide inherent in much of our culture (see Thomas, 1995:5-7, for a discussion of the history of the separation of mind and body). This section will look at a few examples of uses of embodiment by writers already mentioned (Wainwright et al., 2006, Roche, 2011, Rouhiainen, 2008b) before briefly discussing how the concept of embodiment has been used to analyse dancers’ careers and identities.

Embodiment as a theoretical concept is particularly prominent in phenomenological approaches to dance, and many dance scholars interested in theorising the body have found Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology a useful point of reference.

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<sup>20</sup> Note that “vision” does not necessarily mean that the choreographer begins the process with a blueprint for the work to be made. Lindauer (2011:61) mentions a “provocative notion” that “divides artists into those who have a rough idea of what they want to accomplish, which propels them in a certain direction; and others who ‘fiddle around’ until they stumble onto something they like or satisfies them”.

According to Wainwright et al. (2006:551), “Merleau-Ponty rejected the mind–body dualism of Descartes by contending that thinking, feeling and doing are all practical actions that obligate embodiment”. After centuries of Cartesian dualism in which the mind was consistently regarded as superior to the body, the twentieth century saw what Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (2009) calls “the corporeal turn”, a shift towards bringing attention to the body and our existence and experiences as bodies. Acknowledging the importance of the previously overlooked body became *de rigueur*, but Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (2009:2) argues that the use of the term “embodiment” became a mere “lexical band-aid”, a cover-up operation rather than a cure to the problem. Adding the attribute ‘embodied’ to various phenomena may become a kind of reflex and an obligation akin to political correctness. The writer assumes a need to emphasise that she does not subscribe to the old hegemony of the mind and therefore refers to the embodied nature of practices such as dance without necessarily subscribing to all the philosophical implications of the term ‘embodiment’ as used by, for example, Merleau-Ponty.

In their article ‘Varieties of habitus and the embodiment of ballet’ Wainwright et al. (2006) cite Merleau-Ponty as the source for their understanding of embodiment. They explain that the aim of their research is “to produce an ethnography of ballet as a social practice”, and while their theoretical focus is on Pierre Bourdieu’s work and his concept of habitus, the writers emphasise the physical nature of ballet and the habitus as “not simply a state of mind [but] also a bodily state of being” (Wainwright et al., 2006:535, 537). They adopt the term “physical capital” to describe the “fleshy body” and describe “balletic genius” as a combination of “the technical abilities of fleshy bodies (physical capital)” and an “embodied cultural knowledge (artistic capital)” (Wainwright et al., 2006:539). The writers seem to use embodiment in two somewhat

related senses: 1) to describe the expression of inherent and learnt artistic abilities (“the embodiment of artistry”) – and especially 2) to imply the individual physical abilities of the dancer and the bodily knowledge she has accumulated through institutional training and choreographic experience (Wainwright, 2006:539-40).

According to Wainwright et al. (2006:540-41), “[b]allet is an art that is literally inscribed on the body”, i.e., educational histories leave their mark on the dancers’ bodies, and different educations lead to “embodied differences in dance style”. They use “embodied” to define words such as “discipline”, “practices” and “histories” and refer to the inscription of technique and artistry on the dancer’s body through training in particular institutions and dancing for particular choreographers. The focus is on how dancers embody the ideas and ideals presented to them by teachers and choreographers but the choreographer’s body is curiously missing from the picture:

There is a reciprocal relationship between the choreographer’s ideas of what movements he (typically) wants, on how they look on the bodies of the dancers he is inscribing his choreography on, and with how these steps feel for the dancer.

(Wainwright et al., 2006:544)

Presumably the choreographer is also physically involved in the process of choreographic creation, but we do not get a sense of that. Rather, the relationship between the dancer and the choreographer is presented in terms of the choreographer’s mind interacting with the dancer’s body, as ideas interacting with sensations. Embodiment is used to refer to the dancer’s growing bodily knowledge which seems to remain separate from, rather than at one with the mind. The word ‘inscription’ emphasises the grafting of ideas onto bodies.

Roche (2011) uses embodiment in a somewhat similar sense in the context of contemporary dance. She posits that the independent contemporary dancer who trains

in a variety of techniques and works with a variety of choreographers collates these experiences into his/her unique “moving identity” and “can embody a multitude of shapes and forms” (Roche, 2011:109). The moving identity “holds traces of past embodiments that are also available to the dancer to be re-embodied again” (Roche, 2011:111). What is being embodied is a multiplicity of choreographic styles – a growing base of bodily knowledge that the dancer draws upon in her/his work. At the same time embodiment refers to the dancer’s “individual signature moving identity” (Roche, 2011:115). Roche also makes reference to the reciprocal relationship between the dancer’s “embodied multiplicity” and the choreographer’s work: “the choreographic outcome and even the choreographer’s practice can be significantly influenced through the encounter with the dancer’s moving identity” (2011:116).

Although Wainwright et al. (2006) and Roche (2011) discuss individual identities, whether through “habitus” or “moving identities”, their concept of embodiment has a slight sense of looking from the outside in: the dancer embodies practices that are inscribed on her/him by teachers and choreographers. Relying on Merleau-Ponty, Rouhiainen (2008b) looks instead from the inside out: embodiment stems from the individual’s perceptions and experiences of him- or herself in relation to the world around her/him. Rouhiainen (2008b:244) explains that “the embodied subject is directed towards the world”, i.e., most of the time the body knows what to do without needing to involve our “personal or reflective faculties”, leaving us free to engage with the world around us. Considering this natural outward direction of attention, it can be challenging to learn “to perceive how one is embodied from a first-person perspective” or, in other words, “how the body and the self are inter-related”, yet it is through this self-awareness that dialogical relationships to others can be established (Rouhiainen, 2008b:245).



Interestingly, from the dancer's perspective, "the felt-sense of the body is heightened through movement" (Rouhiainen, 2008b:245). The body has an ability to learn complex practical skills and incorporate them into its capacity to function on a pre-reflective level in whatever situations it comes across.

What this tacit and functional unity involves is a sense of mine-ness that forms the foundation of the self. Through the self-reflexivity of the body, having a sensation of one's own body actually involves a sense of ownership, of the individual sensing a lived experience of her or his own being.  
(Rouhiainen, 2008b:245)

Rouhiainen suggests that engaging in somatic practices may increase our capacity for this self-reflexivity, which in turn may develop our ability to engage in ethical embodied dialogue:

I believe that opening upon the body or listening to the body forms a source from which to begin to construe ethical relationships with others. It offers us insight into our pre-reflective experiences and the manner in which we more silently relate to other people and the situations we find ourselves in.  
(Rouhiainen, 2008b:249)

Although embodiment is about being a body, having a body, experiencing, perceiving and acting through a body, all this happens in relation to the situations we find ourselves in. It is through relating to the other that we come to know ourselves better. "We need interaction or dialogical relationships with others in order to gain a wider sense of our own being as well as of the world" (Rouhiainen, 2008b:247). Embodiment, then, is necessarily intertwined with inter-subjectivity. In terms of choreographic processes this means that the concept should be applied to choreographers as well as dancers if we are to avoid perpetuating the separation between mind and body in our analyses of choreographic practices.

## 2.8 Organisations, aesthetics, and dance

Previous research on dance and organisations has looked to dance for different ways to understand and improve organisational life. Management and organisational researchers have turned to dance as both a research and a training method to access the aesthetic, embodied, tacit dimensions of social practice in organisations (Biehl-Missal & Springborg 2016). Ropo and Sauer (2008) have used waltz as a metaphor for hierarchical leader-follower relationships and raves as a narrative approach to the chaotic, networked and collective kind of leadership that is the reality in many organisations today. Similarly, Chandler (2012) looks to the minuet, ballet, tango and raves for analogies for understanding the varying rhythms, choreographies and physicality of work and relationships, gender and emotions in the work place. Bozic and Olsson (2013) interviewed dancers about creative processes to identify sources of creativity that could be employed to produce business innovations. They found that improvisation and its attendant qualities (trust, openness, presence, risk-taking, co-creation, etc.) was a particularly important aspect of choreographic processes, alongside such factors as group and individual feedback and reflection (an iterative process), finding the right group of motivated people from suitably diverse backgrounds and having flexible supporting structures (time, space) to be able to focus on the process.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Bozic and Olsson (2013), like many other organisational scholars interested in arts practices, seem to take for granted that artistic processes can be used as models for creativity or, to use management language, innovation. While I agree with Barry and Meisiek (2010) that arts-based interventions can provide a defamiliarising effect in organisations and thus provoke new ways of understanding and new ideas, I do not believe that we can regard creative processes as innovative by default in quite the way that Bozic and Olsson (2013:61) suggest when they claim that “through developing new artistic products [...] [artists] continuously successfully implement creative ideas, and thus produce innovations”. Firstly, I do not believe that artists are always successful in implementing their ideas. Secondly, creativity can but does not necessarily imply originality or newness in the way innovation does. Finally, artistic products, especially performances, exist in a somewhat different economic environment from business innovations.

Dance is increasingly used in leadership training and management education as a way of introducing aesthetic/emotional/embodied sensibilities to organisations. Ludevig (2016:164) uses movement exercises to “turn-on” embodied knowledge and “unlock innovation” in organisations. Powell and Gifford (2016:148) describe a training programme that was delivered to give leaders “a real physical experience of what performing artists do in order to work successfully in ensembles and to deliver an outstanding performance” and report changed attitudes and improved financial outcomes. Springborg and Sutherland (2016:94) consider how dance exercises can be used to develop “aesthetic reflexivity and agency” in MBA training; similarly, Wetzel and Van Renterghem (2016) find that movement improvisation exercises gave MBA students an experience of informal group coordination arising out of increased mutual body awareness. Zeitner et al. also find that including dance experiences in leadership education may help students develop what they call “embodiary” leadership where “transformational possibilities can be sensed before they can be verbally articulated” (2016:168), as well as introduce them to embodied ways of collaboration and communication.

Many organisational researchers are drawn to dance and dance studies because of their interest in tacit/embodied knowledge, interaction, agency or social relations – and often their own backgrounds as dancers. In their “autoethnographic exploration” of leader-follower dynamics, Matzdorf and Sen (2016:114) use their experience as competitive ballroom dancers as a “metaphor and medium” for the embodied aspects of leading and following in organisations. Hujala et al. (2016) also adopt an autoethnographic approach as they reflect on their experiences of leadership through movement improvisations. They describe dance as a research method that gave them access to meanings beyond their “rational and discursive-level understanding”

(2016:11). Finally, Satama's (2016) ethnographic study of professional dancers aims to show how passion and vulnerability are related to embodied agency<sup>22</sup> in dance and, by extension, other professions.

To summarise, researchers and practitioners interested in organisational aesthetics have turned to dance, choreography and movement improvisation for new ways of understanding tacit, embodied, aesthetic and emotional aspects of social relations and knowledge in organisations, in an effort to improve social relations and facilitate innovations. They have used dance as a metaphor and, more recently, to provide an experiential dimension to training and research. Movement practices have been found useful for widening students' understanding of leadership, followership and agency, and are hoped to encourage creativity. Dance-based organisational research has to deal with the same issues, however, as dance studies does, in that it wants to access knowledge and experiences that are by definition non-verbal.

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<sup>22</sup> Satama (2016:68, 65) defines embodied agency as "skilful, sensory-based doing" and "an inter-relational phenomenon", "a blend of transpersonal and individual leeway to act at work".

### **3. Theory and methodology**

The theoretical foundations of my methodology lie in social constructionism: my research is based on the premise that the social structures of dance-making are continuously produced by dancers' and choreographers' coordinated communicative actions. This chapter introduces the anthropological and sociological framework for my research and situates the study in the fields of dance and organisational ethnography. It covers the methods used for data collection, consisting of (participant)<sup>23</sup> observation, semi-structured interviews and video recordings. The data consist of two case studies of professional dance companies in the process of making new work. A brief summary of the collected materials is given with an explanation of the methods used to analyse them. Thematic categorisation and analysis were chosen because of their flexibility in the face of different types of data and a multidisciplinary approach. Thematic analysis is complemented by close readings of illustrative examples of video data, transcribed/described and analysed with the intention of drawing attention to the multimodality and complexity of interaction and behavioural organisation.

Ethnography is “iterative-inductive” research: theory repeatedly informs but does not dictate data collection and analysis (O'Reilly, 2009:3, 105). While I did not conduct the case studies with any particular theory to prove or disprove, I certainly entered the rehearsal studio with certain definitions of my topics of interest, communication and social interaction. Influenced originally by Vygotskian social constructivism (see e.g. John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996) and taking my cue from symbolic interactionism (see Charon, 2010), I am interested in how people create and perform within their social

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<sup>23</sup> For a discussion on the restricted nature of my participation, see 3.2.2.

reality through reciprocal interaction. Sociologist Joel Charon (2010) defines social interaction as something that happens whenever two or more people take each other's actions into consideration, interpreting them and adjusting their actions to them, and engage in symbolic, intentional communication. I find his notion of mutual influence and "streams of action" helpful:

Social interaction is a certain kind of encounter between two or more actors. It also involves constant definition and redefinition of the acts of others and one's own acts. The essence of social interaction is that each actor acts in part through adjusting what the other actors do. Streams of action cross among actors, and each is influenced by what takes place.

(Charon, 2010:136)

This is a constructionist, dynamic view of how human beings are in the world: identities, societies and cultures are constantly defined in interaction and we actively define, use and act toward our environment rather than being controlled by it. Symbols (words, objects, actions) are socially defined, meaningful and intentionally used to communicate. We both define and label others through our actions – a choreographer gains the label of choreographer by virtue of how dancers, producers, promoters etc. act towards him – but also choose how to present ourselves to others, sometimes rejecting, or trying to reject, the definitions others would bestow upon us. Crucially, social interaction requires taking on the role of the other in order to understand their perspectives – sometimes successfully, at other times missing the mark. (As an interviewer, I once asked a dancer about the frustration she must have felt in a particular situation, only to be corrected that frustration was not how she would describe her emotions at all.) Co-operation is understood as "mutually responsive" communicative co-presence where the other's actions are considered important and where the actors "have a shared focus of attention" and "common or complementary goals" (Charon, 2010:156). It is the reality of co-operation as acted out by dancers and

choreographers that I hope to make visible through ethnographic description and analysis.

### 3.1 Why ethnography?

I chose ethnography as my main methodology because to answer questions about how interaction during dance-making relates to the roles the makers adopt and are assigned I needed to look closely at what dancers and choreographers actually do in addition to what they or other people say they do. Ethnography – “the investigation of human interaction through observation and participation” (Collins & Gallinat, 2010:14) – is well suited to this purpose because it allows for a deliberate combining of emic and etic analytic categories, i.e. the participants’ own views of events and an outside observer’s perceptions of them (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007:194). The ethnographer’s task is “to investigate some aspect of the lives of the people who are being studied [...] includ[ing] finding out how these people view the situations they face, how they regard one another, and also how they see themselves” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007:3). In other words, the ethnographer tries to gain an understanding of the emic view of the participants, but in relation to the researcher’s outsider perspective.<sup>24</sup> One of my aims in this research has been to identify connections and possible discrepancies between how dancers and choreographers talk about their professional identities – their insider view – with what a relative outsider can observe about their work roles in their day-to-day activities.

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<sup>24</sup> The researcher can also be a member of the group she studies, in which case she is straddling emic and etic perspectives from the start; for a discussion of the position of the researcher-practitioner, see e.g. Vellet (2011).

Inasmuch as the topic of my writing is the culture of dance-making in contemporary dance, this research could be termed ‘dance ethnography’, but especially considering my focus on organisational behaviour it is perhaps more fitting to describe it as organisational ethnography that happens to be dealing with how dance companies work. While much of dance ethnography is anthropological in nature, organisational ethnography has a more sociological orientation and is typically undertaken by organisational and management researchers. The distinction between anthropological and sociological ethnography is by no means clear (Neyland, 2008:6) but there seems to be a difference between anthropological and sociological ethnography of dance in terms of the researcher’s insider/outsider position. My ethnography benefits from dance anthropologists’ insights into “embodied ethnography” (Dankworth & David, 2014) while serving a more sociological or social psychological interest in group behaviour and structures and making use of the connections that organisational ethnography has to management research (Eberle & Maeder, 2011). While dance studies have recently informed some organisational research (see 2.8), thinking of dance-making in terms of organisational behaviour presents a hitherto unexplored way to contextualise dancers and choreographers’ work relationships.

### *3.1.1 Dance ethnography: the search for embodied knowledge*

Dance ethnographers have often been interested in traditional or popular dances, whether “at home” or in unfamiliar settings. Studying dance through people’s lives, or people’s lives through dance, has understandably meant putting focus on the dances of the people, whoever they may be – and rarely have they been professionals in contemporary dance. Indeed, according to Theresa J. Buckland (1999:3), for the new generation of students of dance ethnography “the narrowness of the canon of western



theatre art dance is being challenged; not to overturn it, but to gain a more balanced perspective on the practice of dance and codified movement systems of human society”. Dance ethnography can, however, not only diversify our views of dance practices but provide new understandings of theatre/art dance. In her article “An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance” (1983), Joann Kealiinohomoku argues that all dances, including Western theatrical dance forms, are ethnic inasmuch as they have their origins and expressions in particular cultural and societal contexts. We could, indeed, study contemporary dance as a movement tradition that reflects the social structures, values and beliefs in our society. My approach, however, is to focus attention on the communities of dancers and choreographers creating and performing dance rather than on the social and cultural meanings of the dances themselves.

According to Buckland (1999:5), the dance ethnographer can reveal something about a society by immersing herself in its culture and documenting and trying to understand the concepts behind its movement systems. My research may not be dance ethnography in quite this sense, but it is still very much influenced by the dance ethnographer’s approach to her field. Brenda Farnell (1994:929) has argued for “an embodied definition of social actors”: in order to study embodied action we must first accept that people can produce meaning through “both speech and action signs”. For Farnell, this opens the way to analysing movement systems through notation, which is not the aim of my project, but her take on communication as a combination of “simultaneities” (visual/kinaesthetic and vocal utterances) is a good reminder of both the multimodality of communication and the significance of language to our thinking and communicative behaviour. According to Farnell (1999:147),

detailed attention to spoken discourse must enter the research agenda, not because spoken language should act as a model for theories of body movement, but because human beings are language users, and the mind that uses spoken language does not somehow switch off when it comes to moving.

Yet it is also important not to limit research to that which can be easily written down, i.e. words, but to acknowledge that words are only meaningful in context. Farnell (1999:151) gives the example of choreographers employing “metaphorical language to explain and demonstrate simultaneously in order to achieve the desired nuances in a dancer’s performance” and suspects that these processes are culture-specific. A demonstration that makes sense in one language, in one dance genre, at a particular time may be meaningless outside its cultural environment. Ethnography is one way of accessing some of that context.

Western theatre dance in general and contemporary choreography in particular have not attracted many ethnographers, although there are notable exceptions. Cope’s (1976) sociologically oriented ethnographic case study covers the birth and life cycle of a modern dance company. Novack (1990:16) presents a “qualitative, interpretive, and ethnohistorical” account of the history of contact improvisation. Wulff (1998) conducts ethnography in professional ballet companies. Davida (2011b) pursues ethnography in her own dance environment of contemporary dance, as do Newell and Fortin (2011). Most recently, Satama (2016) has used ethnography among professional dancers to study embodied agency in organisations.<sup>25</sup>

The ethnographic study of contemporary dance has to a significant extent been in the hands of practitioners – dancers, choreographers, teachers – and researchers have made use of their own professional experiences in making sense of the events they have

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<sup>25</sup> See chapter 2 for more discussion on these texts.

observed and participated in (see e.g. Davida, 2011). Ethnography “at home” and autoethnography have been the main approaches to contemporary dance, somewhat in contrast with the anthropological study of folk and popular dances, which often, although certainly not always, engages with practices not previously known to the researcher. Ethnographers of theatre dance tend to emphasise the benefits gained from their (full or partial) insider status in the kinds of communities they study and discuss these benefits at some length. There is almost an assumption that this kind of research could not be conducted successfully without a personal experience of participation in similar activities, even while the writers relate their struggles to “make strange”, to not get carried away in participating and to see the events through the eyes of a novice.

The researcher’s insider status can be a current one or based on earlier experience. Trained in ballet in her youth, Wulff (1998:10) defines herself as a former insider, an “ex-native”, and finds that her first-hand knowledge of the “pain” and “passion” of dancing was useful in gaining the dancers’ trust and helped her understand much of what went on in their world (1998:5-6). She makes a point of ballet being a “closed world” and dancers “identify[ing] themselves as different from other people”, thus suggesting that it is easier for another dancer than a complete outsider to relate to them, although she also recognises “the form [of nativeness] that comes with becoming a part of the setting on a daily basis” (1998:10-11).

Other art dance ethnographers identify more clearly as practitioner-researchers. In her introduction to *Fields in Motion: Ethnography in the Worlds of Dance*, Davida emphasises that the ethnographic articles in the book have been written by “dance world insider[s]” who are “doing fieldwork at home” and face the problems of “*being* native” rather than “going native” (2011a:2-3; emphasis original). They are called

“artist-fieldworkers” and “visceral ethnographers with a highly developed kinaesthetic empathy, as much passionate participant as cool-headed observer” (2011a:4); they wonder if it is even possible to put their somatic experiences into words and sometimes struggle to constrain their “physical sensibility” (2011a:4) as they try to keep to their role as researchers. Davida almost seems to suggest that the “art worlds of dance” can only be studied ethnographically by those (professionally) involved in them – that ballet and contemporary dance are such specialist pursuits that an outsider, not physically trained in dance, could not grasp them.

Insider researchers are a common phenomenon in organisational ethnography as well, but some researchers have, nevertheless, been able to study communities of professionals even though they have not been able to fully engage in their activities (see e.g. Ramshaw, 2012, on police patrolling and Crawford & Branch, 2015, on rural chambers of commerce). Cope’s (1976) study demonstrates that this is also possible in the field of dance. Cope is not a dancer herself and does not rely on personal movement experience and training to understand the work of the group. Her “non-participant observer” (Cope, 1976:83) status makes her perhaps more dependent on the participants’ accounts of events but it also allows her to make observations that would elude the participants themselves. The dance-initiated readers of Cope’s work are reminded of the peculiarities of dance rehearsals and performances that they have come to take for granted, ranging from how dancers dress for rehearsals to how unfamiliar a non-expert audience may find modern dance.

Yet it should be noted that some aspects of a choreographic process are difficult to understand or even notice without personal experience of them. As Vellet (2011:224)

explains, her analysis of how gestures are transmitted from choreographer to dancer would be a challenging task to a complete outsider:

an insider, someone in an emic position, can also analyze a change in the choreographer's strategy, because the insider will also try to understand how the choreographic problem can be solved. This is because past experience in the dance world allows him to notice it.

A dancer or a choreographer can read the rehearsal situation in a way a lay person cannot – but equally a genuine outsider has easier access to observations that an insider would take for granted.

My position is somewhere in between. Having studied folk dance to degree level and had some education in contemporary dance and choreography, I was certainly not a stranger in a strange land when I first entered the studio, but neither did I belong to the “community of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) I found there. When introduced to dancers and other company members, quite often I was asked if I was a dancer or a choreographer, whether I make work myself or have studied dance. That my interest in the working culture of a dance company should have a personal dimension seemed like a logical conclusion – why else would I be interested in or qualified to research such a specialist topic?

At times my relative outsider status made me question my ability to gain more than formal access to the experiences I was trying to record, especially because of the recent emphasis in dance ethnography on embodied knowledge. Ethnography in general implies at least some level of participation, learning by doing and becoming a member of the group studied; as discussed above, contemporary dance ethnography often places particular emphasis on first-person experience and a participatory, embodied method of observation and data collection. Analysing this “methodological paradigm

shift toward embodied practice”, Sally Ann Ness (2004:137) finds that an embodied rather than observational method lends a more “temporally complex” and culturally attuned description that addresses the “how-to” of movement rather than the causes of it. In contrast, earlier “observation-driven descriptions” treated dance as an entry point to other anthropological interests, including “social structure and organization, aesthetic judgment, and political action” (Ness, 2004:129).

Perhaps for this reason, my research sits slightly uncomfortably within dance ethnography: I observed dancers and choreographers but could become neither, and the focus of my research was indeed on the social structure and organisation of the process rather than the dance itself. On the other hand, Ann R. David (2013) notes that while the ethnographer’s chances of participating in movement may vary between full participation and none, there are different ways of gaining embodied experience of the practice under observation: dance and movement training outside the studied community can yield an embodied understanding of what is happening, and any presence in the field has a bodily dimension to it. Furthermore, as Collins and Gallinat (2010:10) suggest, not sharing the research participants’ experiences provides ethnographic insights that are different from those of an “insider” but equally significant. They call the self “the incubator of ethnography” and emphasise that “the self is central to all human interaction” (Collins & Gallinat, 2010:11, 14). Not only were my research participants defining themselves and each other in social interaction; I was a participant in this process of mutual definition. As a researcher present and communicating with the participants I was constructing my identity and being constructed, acting out my role as a researcher while applying the roles of dancer and choreographer to others. Taking the role of the other and relying on my memories of past experiences as I was (Charon, 2010; Collins, 2010), one could perhaps claim that

I was engaging with embodied knowledge of the dance; I was certainly “emplaced” (David, 2013:45) in the interaction, even in my outsider role.

A dance ethnographic approach emphasises embodied knowledge and first-hand experience, whether through participation or memory and empathy. For my research, it also offers perspectives on the interplay of verbal and nonverbal interaction within dance events that an organisational ethnography might miss.

### *3.1.2 In/about/for organisations: organisational ethnography*

Rather than a distinct research methodology within a particular academic field, organisational ethnography is the common term for any research in and about organisations that relies primarily on observational data. Organisational ethnographies are written by anthropologists, sociologists and management researchers alike, and increasingly *for* organisations rather than merely *of* organisational behaviour (Eberle & Maeder, 2011:54-55). “In organizational studies,” John Van Maanen (1979:539) writes of his field of research, “the patterns of interest are typically the various forms in which people manage to do things together in observable and repeated ways”. The organisational ethnographer may study how members organise their activities to produce social order, or take a more theoretical approach and study either a specific phenomenon within organisations or associate the ethnography with a particular organisational theory.

Sociologists Thomas S. Eberle and Christoph Maeder (2011:60-62) list some approaches to organisational ethnography, among them an ethnomethodological one that considers issues such as “sense-making in interaction and organization as a joint production of accomplishments”. However, while my research engages with these

concepts and takes this ethnomethodological view of interaction into account, my primary approach is that of an ethnographer who tries to “describe and understand an organizational culture as a complex system of meaning guiding everyday routines in a work setting” (Eberle & Maeder, 2011:62). My goal has been to identify social interactive phenomena (such as, for example, dancers seeking the choreographer’s approval for their independently found solutions) and relate them to theoretical organisational concepts (such as communities of practice).

Our metaphors for organisations – the organisation as a machine, ecosystem, power struggle, etc. – influence how we conceptualise organisational behaviour (Eberle & Maeder, 2011:59). Perhaps the most significant contribution that my research can make lies simply in approaching choreographic processes from an organisational point of view, analysing ways that dance companies are comparable to other work places, and thus opening up new ways to conceptualise choreographic practices. It also draws attention to the fact that the dance profession and any issues within it do not exist in isolation. Of course the work activities of a dancer differ significantly from those of a banker, teacher or agricultural labourer, as do the structures of their respective professional organisations, but it is important to acknowledge that such structures are at work in dance companies, that dance is, indeed, a work activity for professional dancers and choreographers, and that as such it cannot be completely separate from other organisations and institutions functioning in the same cultural and societal framework. Dance companies are governed by laws, subject to financial realities and influenced by the values and norms of the larger society.

Organisations typically feature some degree of hierarchies and power structures. These not only present themselves as observable phenomena but require the ethnographer to



be aware that they will influence both the streams of “operational” activities and, importantly, how participants present themselves to each other, to the researcher, and to other outsiders.<sup>26</sup> Power also relates to another concern of organisational ethnography: taking into account the target audience and who, if anyone, commissioned the study (see Neyland, 2008:9-10). Although I did not have any apparent issues navigating the hierarchies in either dance company, they did present issues regarding, for instance, how to protect the anonymity of the participants. Furthermore, while my research was not commissioned by either company, hopes were expressed that it might benefit the participants by perhaps offering tools for dance companies to develop their work cultures. I will discuss these ethical issues in 3.4 below.

Although, as a dance ethnographer, I was worried about being too much of an outsider to gain a participant’s view of the choreographic process, I was also hopeful that my relative distance from the practices of dance-making would help me recognise the obvious as well as the exceptional in them. Eberle and Maeder (2011:57) warn that too much familiarity with a research setting make it difficult to notice “the regular and ordinary features of daily routines”, but Neyland (2008:7) assures us that “[t]hrough a thoroughly sceptical treatment of each aspect of organizational activity, the ethnographer can get close to those everyday features of activity which hold the organization together”. In hindsight I realise that as I found my place in the processes I did in fact become an “insider” in them, albeit a non-dancing one, and maintaining

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<sup>26</sup> Van Maanen (1979:542) explains the difference between two kinds of data: operational data “documents the running stream of spontaneous conversations and activities engaged in and observed by the ethnographer while in the field” whereas presentational data “concern those appearances that informants strive to maintain (or enhance) in the eyes of the fieldworker, outsiders and strangers in general, work colleagues, close and intimate associates, and to varying degrees, themselves”.

sufficient emotional distance from the participants and a suitably critical view of their activities became increasingly difficult.

Neyland (2008) lists ethnographic “sensibilities” to help ethnographers manage (organisational) ethnographic research. The sensibilities do not prescribe a linear process of investigation but rather considerations that should be revisited throughout the research as the need arises; I found myself returning to questions of access, time spent in and out of the field, and exits, for instance. These aspects of ethnographic research may be dictated by the organisation to a significant degree. The companies I worked with did not pose limitations on my activities – I was allowed to attend all activities during my time with each company – but I was fully dependent on the choreographers for organisational access. Especially for the second case study, a freelance choreographer working with a repertory company, I was “in” and “out” of the organisation with the choreographer, aiming to be present whenever he was and exiting as he left the company. This was a choice dictated by how I formulated my research questions, limiting myself to the rehearsal process, but also reflects how much the choreographers were my gatekeepers to these companies, and how much the choreographer is in charge of the creative process whether or not he has a permanent position with the company. My entrances and exits, although mainly practical solutions, were also assumptions about what a choreographic process *is* and, even more importantly, *whose* process it is. I did not witness the lengthy preparations that the choreographers made to make these works possible, nor was I present when the dancers continued the process of performing the pieces at different venues, for different audiences. This research is a snapshot of what dance companies do in the rehearsal studio, but the full extent of their organisational realities reaches beyond my observations.

## 3.2 Methods & materials

Ethnography is defined by the critical role of observation as a method of data collection, but it also involves various other methods of gathering data: interviews, audio and video recordings, collections of artefacts (Eberle & Maeder, 2011:54). I followed the creation period of two new dance works as closely as possible as a participant observer, complementing my observations with semi-structured, open-ended interviews with the participants and filming parts of the rehearsals for later analysis. My interest was in the community of practice of dance professionals, in the everyday working lives of contemporary dancers and choreographers and more specifically in the rehearsal event where most of their professional interaction takes place. My purpose as an observer was “not to disturb the normal order of the event” and to record three levels of description: “the perceivable reality, information and comments elicited from the participants and personal commentaries” (Giurchescu, 1999:47). This section introduces the methods I used to gather data and relates them to my fieldwork experiences.

### 3.2.1 *Sampling and access*

I gained access to my case study companies quite serendipitously, through informal connections, but the project design was always such that any choreographic process could provide useful material if the research questions were modified accordingly, so I was not overly concerned about “sampling for representativeness” when recruiting participants (O’Reilly, 2009:194). Because of my interest in seeing how rehearsal interaction turns into a performable artwork, I wanted to observe new creations; a completely new process would also be more accessible since I would be learning about

the work at the same pace as the participants. My other criteria were that the case study projects had to take place at a suitable time with regard to my degree requirements, in an accessible location, and they had to involve a group of professional contemporary dance-makers (as opposed to educational, community or solo projects) who were willing to grant me access to their process. Recommendations from mutual friends led me to two choreographers who were in the very early stages of productions that met all these conditions. I approached one choreographer in person after attending a dance class led by him and the other by email; both soon accepted my request to observe their work.<sup>27</sup> Having already gained ethical approval for the whole project from the university (see Appendix B), I had no further institutional permissions to acquire in the case of the Freelance Company; to gain access to the Repertory Company I also corresponded with company representatives and obtained written permission to carry out my research at the theatre.<sup>28</sup>

By chance, the projects were similar in scale, and in both cases the resulting work was performed on tour, but the companies were organised differently: one was a freelance ensemble built and led by the choreographer, the other a repertory company working with a visiting freelance choreographer. This structural difference has yielded interesting comparisons, although how far these can be generalised to how work is organised in companies with similar structures is debatable.

Sampling while in the field proved at times challenging. As Karen O'Reilly (2009:194-195) points out, the ethnographer simply cannot follow everyone and everything at

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<sup>27</sup> I approached other choreographers (of different age, gender and ethnicity), who either had no suitable productions planned or did not want to invite an observer into their process. For each case study, I worked with the first choreographer and company I could find that agreed to let me study their creation process and fulfilled my other criteria.

<sup>28</sup> In both companies I was only properly introduced to the dancers on the first day of rehearsals; see 3.4.1 for a discussion on the ethical issues of gaining informed consent from dancers and thus maintaining access to the company.

once; choices have to be made, often quite quickly, and while ideally those choices would be “theoretically informed”, in practice they are often dictated by circumstances. Especially on days when many things were happening at once I had to choose whom to observe without much idea which activities would prove to be unique or typical, how long they would last, what consequences they would have (which sections would be discarded and which developed further), or how recordable they would be. By sometimes focusing on a single person or small group and sometimes dividing my attention and camera focus between all participants I tried to capture the flavour of these choreographic processes: activities are often layered, there are frequent stops and starts, and the working day can look quite different from the point of view of individual members of the group depending on their tasks and responsibilities on any given day.

### *3.2.2 Participant observation*

My aim was to follow the process of creating a new dance work from the beginning of rehearsals until performance, which turned out to be fairly achievable. The first case study project, a freelance choreographer working with a group of freelance dancers chosen by him (i.e, the Freelance Production), had begun with a short research and development period a year before I joined the process for the six-week rehearsal period leading up to the first performance. The piece was developed further after the opening night when I was no longer following the company. As for the second case study, a freelance choreographer commissioned by a permanent repertory company (i.e., the Repertory Production), I attended nearly all rehearsals led by the choreographer – four weeks followed by a three-month break, and another couple of weeks dispersed over a month; I missed the work the company did on the piece between and after these

periods, without the supervision of the visiting choreographer. This was, then, participant observation in short bursts, going back and forth between the groups studied and the academic research community, rather than complete long-term immersion – a necessary arrangement when studying groups such as dance companies that come together only at certain times in varying locations (see Crang & Cook, 2007:39).

The reason for my lack of participation is simple and common enough in organisational ethnography: if the work that the organisation does is highly skilled and specialised, the researcher has little choice but to become a non-participating observer without professional responsibilities within the organisation (Eberle & Maeder, 2011:64). In my case full participation in the choreographic processes was not an option, but I was not a complete outsider, having had some training in contemporary dance and choreography and taking part in the dancers and choreographers' activities whenever I could: warming up and taking class, learning new skills, filming runs, running errands, occasionally taking part in conversation if my opinion was solicited during briefing or feedback sessions. I experienced something of what the dancers described in their interviews: it made me feel more like a part of the group that my voice was invited and heard, but I also felt, perhaps even more than the dancers, that mine was not the opinion that necessarily needed to be heard, that there was not enough time, that what I had to say was not important enough. These thoughts usually served to silence me, even though occasionally speaking up was useful in giving me a more varied experience of the interaction I was studying. As discussed in the previous chapter, who is allowed to talk and how much in the dancer-choreographer relationship is an issue that has attracted critical attention from dance scholars. I will address the topic further in the following chapter (see 4.2 in particular).

As Charlotte Aull Davies (1999:72) points out, not only are there many possible levels of participation in ethnographic research but even within a project the researcher's level of participation is not a constant. In both case studies, I found more opportunities for participation at the beginning of the process when there was more time for and focus on experimentation and learning new skills. There were moments of participation throughout especially in the second case study – taking class, taking part in exercises not directly designed to produce material, helping with filming or props – but as the pieces gradually came into existence, so my role in the room shifted. Although I knew the participants better, as a non-performer I could no longer share in as many of the dancers' daily experiences as before; while there was no marked difference in how the choreographers related to me in different stages of the process, they were under increasing pressure to finish their work and I was aware of having to let them get on with it.

O'Reilly has captured the ambivalent status of the (participant) observer well:

Hoping people accept you in their world yet at the same time trying to access groups you would not normally access [...] and **asking questions** people do not normally ask, can make an ethnographer feel insecure and act apologetically. The tension between subjectivity and objectivity, detached observer and participant, group member and ethnographer, always remain[s] whether one is literally adapting to a strange and 'other' culture or observing a parallel culture from a mental distance.

(O'Reilly, 2009:158, emphasis original)

The tension between my professional role (observer, researcher, outsider) and my social role in the group (new acquaintance, perhaps a friend, a temporary group member) was palpable, and I kept questioning my role and approach to field relations throughout. I may not have been a fully immersed participant in the groups I was observing, but I became a part of the choreographic process nevertheless. I found that taking class with the dancers each morning was an excellent way to gain experiential

knowledge of the choreographer's methods and authority and to physically bond with the dancers in the second case study. Reaching a similar physical state as the dancers and sharing in exercises designed to aid bonding and finding common focus, sometimes through physical contact, created a closeness that was sometimes lacking in the first case study where there was no morning class. As Skinner (2010:112) writes, "[t]ouch [...] is a sense with an especial modality of perception in that it blurs subject and object, bringing them together". It also rings true based on my experiences that "often it's the least recorded, most unexpected personal moment or accident that becomes most viscerally remembered" (Kohn, 2010:186). My moments of being and doing together with the participants have formed more vivid memories in my mind than the long hours I spent sitting in the sidelines, focusing on committing as much as possible to memory. The notes I took in the studio and the diary entries I wrote in the evenings contain plenty of events I have now all but forgotten; the situations I remember without prompting are mostly personal encounters and conversations that took place outside the studio and sometimes outside the work setting entirely.

### *3.2.3 Interviews*

I complemented observation with semi-structured interviews. I was interviewing people with whom I had already spent time, often asking questions about situations I had witnessed, so the two were very much connected. While "interviewing can by no means be treated as a separate method because all social research involves learning through conversation" (Crang and Cook, 2007:60), it should nevertheless be noted that interviews, especially recorded ones, are events out of the ordinary, not "normal" conversations. There may be "give-and-take" about the interview as conversation (Skinner, 2013:8), but there is also a tendency for the interviewer to direct the



interviewee towards the topics she wants to cover for her research while claiming that the responses that interviewees give to open-ended questions are “in their own words and not restricted to the preconceived notions of the ethnographer” (Davies, 1999:94-95). Silverman (1993:95) warns against the naivety of “assum[ing] that open-ended or non-directive interviewing is not in itself a form of social control which shapes what people say”. After all, the interviewer has already made the assumption that the interviewee has something relevant to say on a topic (in my case dancer-choreographer relationships) before asking the first question. Likewise Wooffitt (2005:18) reminds us that the “[d]escriptions, anecdotes, stories, comments, accounts” that interviewees relate reflect not only the context of the interview but also the functions that they are meant to perform. How did the dancers and choreographers want to appear to me or to any audience my research may have? I can only speculate, but for the most part they seemed to offer their cooperation willingly.

It became quite clear how much I was influencing and constructing the interview situation when one of the dancers, at the end of the interview, said: “I used the word communication quite a few times, I think I did match your theme” (RepD4). The participants knew that the working title of my research was Communication in the Choreographic Process, and to some extent they were composing their responses so as to be useful to me, guided by what they thought I would find interesting or what they found interesting about my topic. While interesting, the interviewees’ conceptions of communication did not necessarily stand out as the most important features of the interviews during analysis. I am also aware of the danger described well by Skinner (2013) of the interviews, rich and plentiful as they are, overpowering the messier and less well recorded observational data. Both unavoidably show my biases and preconceptions as a researcher but the interviews doubly so, being purely the product

of my research activities in contrast to the relatively naturally occurring events of the rehearsals.

I conducted interviews with the choreographer in each production, the rehearsal director of the Repertory Production, all but one of the performing dancers and one non-performing intern.<sup>29</sup> The length of the interviews varied between half an hour and an hour and a half, depending mainly on the availability of the interviewees but also on how the interview was going. The combined length of the recordings is just over sixteen hours. The first set of interviews was video as well as audio recorded; in the second set only audio was recorded for practical reasons. It was crucial to record the interviews so as to be able to analyse *how* the interviewees tell their stories, to have their exact words (Crang & Cook, 2007:81). The recording device added an unavoidable element of formality to the interview situation, but the interviewees were already used to my constant recording and note-taking.

The interviews with the Freelance Dancers took place after the rehearsal period and the first performances. I visited most of these interviewees in their homes at a time of their choosing (one was interviewed at a performance venue) and interviewed them at length (the recordings range from 45 to 90 minutes). The interviews were based on an earlier version of the general, rather than the production-specific, questions presented in Appendix C, but the interviewees often introduced the Freelance Production into the discussion. By the time of the second case study I had analysed the first set of interviews enough to know that I wanted to ask the dancers more specifically about

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<sup>29</sup> One dancer initially agreed but later declined to be interviewed. Partly because the first interviews took place after the rehearsal period, I chose only to interview the dancers who were performing and not the interns in the Freelance Production. As a permanent company the second case study group was more close-knit and it seemed appropriate to interview everyone who volunteered, including interns/apprentices; no one refused.

working in a group and their understandings of collaboration, and refined my general questions accordingly. The interviews with Repertory Dancers took place during the third and fourth week of rehearsals, all of them at the theatre before or after work or during lunch break, and because we were very much in the middle of the process, it seemed helpful to ask more production-specific questions (see Appendix C). Because of the location and time of day these interviews tended to be shorter than the first ones (30-60 minutes). The Producer-Choreographer was interviewed once two months after the final performance of the tour at a venue he was working in (a long interview of 85 minutes) and the Visiting Choreographer twice, first at the theatre during the third week of rehearsals and again on the day of the second performance (combined length 100 minutes).

I used the questions in Appendix C to guide the conversation, but my aim was to let the conversation flow somewhat naturally and to choose next questions based on previous answers, engaging the interviewees in questions that they found relevant rather than following my list in the order I had written it. All interviews began with the interviewees talking about their dance background and moved on to their preferred work roles and methods, job descriptions, information needs and communicative preferences. I also asked about positive and negative past experiences, trying to understand what makes a choreographic process or a work relationship successful or meaningful for the participants. Because of the relatively short time I had for fieldwork in each case (reflecting the short time the companies had to create a new piece) I tried to focus on what I felt were key issues for the research at that point, but focus came at the cost of conversational flow and made the interview situations more formal than I would have liked. On the one hand it was of course appropriate that the participants were aware of the “official” nature of the opinions they expressed during the

recordings but on the other hand it seemed to put the interviewees in a position where they were trying to give me what I needed in terms of the research rather than what was relevant to their experience.<sup>30</sup>

While the purpose of ethnographic interviewing is typically to find out the names and meanings that the interviewees give things, that is, to gain an emic view of the culture in question, I was also interested in the “knowing how” of choreographic practices. Practical knowledge is typically inexplicit and “enmeshed in action” (Bloch, 1998:viii), and the interviewee may be unaware of it or unable to verbalise it. This kind of knowledge may be made more accessible by using video as a feedback tool, showing the interviewees rehearsal clips of themselves and asking them to talk about the events on camera (aka self-confrontation) (Gore et al., 2012). My use of video prompts was informed by the techniques of elicitation (or explicitation) and stimulated recall interviews. The interviewee is prompted to “re-live” and immediately describe the experiences recorded on video in order to access her tacit and embodied knowledge (Gore et al., 2012). Showing the interviewees examples of their interactions can be a useful tool for analysing which signals are important to them, how they interpret these signals and what they mean with the signals that they give to others (Dempsey, 2010). Audio-visual prompting may create conditions in which “pre-reflective knowledge” about “a moment of action experienced by the subject” may become accessible to the interviewee (Maurel, 2009:8). This can help the researcher identify possible inconsistencies between the “[m]otivations and rationales that informants describe retrospectively [and] those that they actually held in the moment of the experience” (Dempsey, 2010:349). By showing the interviewees video clips of themselves in

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<sup>30</sup> A method I did not try but would consider using in the future is conducting interviews in pairs or groups, introducing only one or two topics and keeping the interview short and informal.

rehearsals I was able to remind them of their experiences of particular moments of interaction and gain a better understanding of how they perceived those moments. Difficulties in finding suitable footage for each interviewee, particularly when interviewing participants in the early stages of the choreographic process, and needing to keep the interviews to a manageable length meant, however, that using video was not always an option.

While acknowledging that each creative process is unique, in the analysis that follows I will treat the case studies as a common pool of material for analysis, especially as regards interviews. I will relate interview material to particular events in their respective processes where relevant, but the interviews also cover experiences beyond the case study processes. It should also be noted that many of the dancers have made work and both choreographers have experience as dancers. In addition to the case study projects, they were interviewed about their overall professional experience, and their responses reflect their careers beyond the roles they had in the two processes studied.

### *3.2.4 Visual ethnography*

Christian Heath (2011:264) advocates video as a tool for researching situated action in social sciences, claiming that it can provide resources “to address the key principles of qualitative research with its commitment to the situated character of practical action, the orientations of the participants themselves and the practices through which they accomplish social actions and activities”. Of course the camera does not capture “an untainted reality” (Pink, 2007:103); choosing when and what to record and from which angle is already a form of editing, and the presence of a camera can affect behaviour. Video nevertheless enables types of analysis that are not possible from memory alone,

including detailed analysis of interaction, and video-based research has made an important contribution to the study of work and organisation and how they are accomplished through social interaction (Heath, 2011:253). Video is also a fairly unobtrusive way to record dance rehearsals considering how often cameras are used as tools in choreographic processes anyway (cf. Pink, 2007:45, 103).

I filmed extensively during both case studies: the footage amounts to 54 hours 20 minutes for the Freelance Production and 52 hours 38 minutes for the Repertory Production. Everything was recorded by me with one camera only, most of the time with an external microphone for added clarity of audio. Very occasionally I was able to take a handheld camera close to the participants; most of the time the camera was on a stationary tripod in a corner or on the sides of the studio. The camera was nearly always on standby when I was in the room and I sometimes left it to record without me but also sat next to it without recording; it became part of the furniture and an extension of my note-taking activities. The participants would sometimes ask me whether I was filming or whether I had caught an interesting remark on camera, and my constant scribbling was a source of both amusement and bemusement. Both groups seemed to get used to the camera quickly, however, mainly noting its presence when something unexpected or things of a personal nature happened. The choreographers mostly used, and often asked me or one of the dancers to use, their own cameras for their work, but occasionally I would be asked to film something on my camera to then share the footage with the choreographer.

Acquiring footage that would be clear enough for close analysis was problematic within the parameters of this project. With only one camera and dealing with continuously moving subjects, it was particularly difficult to record the contributions

of all participants to a given activity (see Heath, 2011:261), although extensive note-taking helped in filling some of the gaps. Furthermore, best camera angles are difficult to predict in an environment of constant movement and changes of direction, and there is often a lot of extraneous noise in the room and from outside it (music, many groups working at the same time, material that generates percussive sounds) which makes following the conversation difficult. This posed insurmountable challenges for the detailed conversation analysis I had planned: with the subjects often facing away from the camera and microphone, it is sometimes difficult to make out what they say, and impossible to confidently discern for instance the direction of their gaze or gestures. Despite these issues I was hoping to be able to follow Goodwin (e.g. 1986, 1995, 2007) in my approach to conversation analysis and find single instances of sufficiently well recorded embodied interaction to study instead of aiming for a collection of occurrences of a certain pattern, but even this plan proved too ambitious. Instead, I have used longer sections of video to describe typical or thematically relevant events in as much detail as was feasible.

### 3.3 Types of analysis

The gathered data – observations and notes, interviews, video and audio recordings – have been analysed thematically; some excerpts have also been transcribed in more depth to focus on various features of interaction. This section introduces these methods of analysis, including transcription principles.

### 3.3.1 Transcription

Communication and education scholars Jeff Bezemer and Diane Mavers (2011:191) note the importance of multimodal transcriptions to social research based on video recordings and emphasise their constructionist nature: transcription is a “meaning making practice” that reflects the theoretical paradigms of the researchers doing it. While they are “constrained by the social context,” researchers nevertheless “make significant *representational choices*” (Bezemer & Mavers, 2011:194, emphasis original). They choose where to set the camera and when to turn it on. They frame the activities by labelling them (e.g. task-setting by choreographer) and reframe them through transcription as befits their academic purposes. With regard to their research questions, they select particularly telling clips to transcribe and highlight certain features within them (e.g. focusing on a particular participant’s point of view), reconstructing the interaction selectively. Thus the transcripts are inherently analytic and tied to their academic context (e.g. conversation analysis, movement analysis, social psychology, musicology, etc.), and their accuracy should be judged in context. The researcher needs to also consider her selections and representational choices from an ethical point of view, taking into consideration how activities appear out of their immediate context and what is made visible (Bezemer & Mavers, 2011).

I transcribed all the interviews and selected video excerpts myself and thus had full control of the analytical process involved. As Gail Jefferson (1994), the developer of a widely used glossary of transcription symbols for conversation analysis, demonstrates, there is hardly an end to how detailed a transcription can be, and one never knows what the details may reveal until one finds it. As mentioned before, although my approach to transcribing rehearsal footage was influenced by



conversation analysis and I have used some of Jefferson's transcription symbols (see Appendix D), the quality of my material does not allow for a particularly granular transcription (see 3.2.4). I have purposefully chosen to transcribe some events that allow a kind of zooming in (Example 5 in 4.5.1 in particular) to accompany others that consist mainly of summaries of events (e.g. Example 4 in 4.4.1) – more description than transcription. The video excerpts were chosen to illustrate themes that emerged from interviews and observations; other events could have served the same purpose but were not recorded or the footage was not as good. The main purpose of the video transcriptions presented with the analysis in chapter four is to draw attention to how actions (including speech) form complex yet repetitive patterns in dance rehearsals, and how these patterns depend on the situated roles (dancer, choreographer, rehearsal director, apprentice dancer) of the people involved. Hence they involve abundant notes on the participants' actions and gestures interspersed with their words and vocalisations.

All interviews were transcribed from audio recordings.<sup>31</sup> Aware that interview transcription is also “an interpretative process” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009:177), I initially transcribed without punctuation, included some indication of the length of pauses and the type of nonverbal vocalisations, and included all repetition and hesitation. For purposes of readability and because I am not analysing the interview as an interactive practice, the interview excerpts presented in the text have been edited to erase most repetition and hesitation, to include punctuation and at times (and only if the quote would otherwise be very difficult to understand out of context) standardise non-native English speakers' idiosyncratic grammatical and lexical choices according

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<sup>31</sup> For reasons of confidentiality, the transcripts cannot be published; anonymous excerpts are used to illustrate points made in further chapters.

to my best understanding. Any uncertain interpretations have been marked as such with brackets and question marks.

### *3.3.2 Thematic analysis*

The data collected were subjected to thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), which proved to be a useful way of making sense of interviews and field notes. (Due to the prohibitively large amount of data, video recordings were transcribed and analysed very selectively, as described above, and used to illustrate the themes found in other data.) Thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006:79). It is not theoretically affiliated and is therefore flexible enough to cope with a multidisciplinary project, in this case as a “contextualist” method which

acknowledge[s] the ways individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings, while retaining focus on the material and other limits of ‘reality’.

(Braun & Clarke, 2006:81)

Braun and Clarke (2006:80) emphasise the importance of recognising that the researcher actively makes decisions about what s/he is interested in and looks for in the material. The themes s/he identifies are to a significant extent her/his constructions rather than objective truths hidden in the data, waiting to be exposed. Themes are identified on the basis of prevalence, which can be determined based on the number of times they appear, but if a theme is particularly relevant to the research question, its prevalence does not need to be undermined by its low frequency. In my case, some of the frequently occurring events and topics that I noticed kept noticing in the beginning (e.g. how movements and sections were named, or the indexicality of movements and

gestures) turned out to be less relevant to my interest in dancer-choreographer relationships as did harder to capture elements of interaction, such as affect and trust.

I have chosen to focus my analysis on themes that highlight the organisational context of the choreographic process and the social construction of the professional roles of dancers and choreographers. Despite this viewpoint guiding my analysis I have aimed at a data-driven, inductive approach, instead of looking for answers to particular questions. I have made some attempts to identify latent themes – the “*underlying* ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations [...] that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data” – but mainly I have adopted a “semantic approach”, looking at what is happening on the surface level of interaction (Braun and Clarke, 2006:84, emphasis original).

My overall research questions concern the professional roles and relationships of contemporary choreographers and dancers as acted out in social interaction during the choreographic process. More specifically, I have been looking at how those roles are constructed in communication (4.1), what patterns of interaction can tell us about agency (4.2) and leadership (4.3) in choreography, what meanings and definitions are given to collaboration in contemporary choreography (4.4), how dancers and choreographers communicate trust (4.5) and how they enact their communities of practice and make sense of their work (4.6). Coding the interview data involved identifying responses that related to communication or work roles and grouping them into categories such as trust, agency, ownership/authorship, collaboration, motivation, expectations and information needs. Field notes were searched for categories that had suggested themselves at the time of writing, for events and observations that relate to the categories found in the interviews, and for any new categories that the notes and

recordings could illustrate. The field notes were particularly useful as a record of the different stages of the process, from introductions and creative tasks to run-throughs and technical rehearsals, as well as their impact on interaction. They catalogue many of the various creative and communicative activities and modes that the participants engage in: problem-solving, decision-making, time management, feedback, marking, repetition, demonstration, signposting, and so on. The categories were then crossed with concepts from organisation studies to produce the analysis found in chapter 4.

### *3.3.3 Views on interaction*

As an ethnographer, I am attempting to distance myself from the choreographic process enough to see past my preconceptions and to distinguish between what the participants do, and what they say they do. From a social constructionist perspective, the essence of a social situation such as a choreographic process lies in the communicative events that constitute it. I have therefore complemented thematic analysis of ethnographic materials with a closer, defamiliarising look at some of the communicative events captured in my recordings. That “ordinary talk is a highly organized, socially ordered phenomenon” is a central tenet of conversation analysis (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008:11), but we are so fluent in producing and interpreting that order that we cannot readily perceive it. The combination of the various modalities of communication in transcription is therefore revealing of the otherwise easily overlooked complexity of the interactive practices in dance-making. Furthermore, studying patterns of communication in institutional/organisational settings can provide insights into “how social action is related to social structures” (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008:4), i.e., how people produce institutional roles and hierarchies through interaction.

My approach could be varyingly termed ethnography of communication / linguistic ethnography (see e.g. Hymes, 2010; Saville-Troike, 2003; Rampton, 2007), interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz, 1982; Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 2006; Günthner, 2008), linguistic anthropology (Duranti, 1997) or conversation analysis (e.g. Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008), all of which share an interest in face-to-face communication and the construction and contextualisation of communicative events. These perspectives differ in their disciplinary origins and affiliations – some are more linguistically, others more anthropologically or sociologically oriented – but their premises are similar enough to jointly provide a framework for my analysis.<sup>32</sup> In this section, I will introduce the concepts that form the foundation of my approach to interaction in this research.

In section 4.1 I deal with the components of communication roughly as a linguistic ethnographer might define them (see Hymes, 2010; Saville-Troike, 2003). These are ethnographic observations intended to provide context to the communicative events analysed. What types or genres of communicative events (e.g. task-setting, note-giving) typically take place in a choreographic process, the choreographic process being the “communicative situation” that frames these events (Saville-Troike, 2003:23)? What is the topic and purpose of communicating? Who are the participants, where are they, what messages are they trying to convey and how? What are the rules and norms governing the situation? I will apply these questions to choreographic processes as communicative situations rather than to each example event in particular.

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<sup>32</sup> I am inclined to agree with sociolinguist Dell Hymes’ (2010:6) comment on the place of the ethnography of communication within academic disciplines: “the division of the study of man into departmentalized disciplines seems itself often arbitrary and an obstacle”.

These ethnographic observations pave the way for further analysing the *communicative competence* exercised by the participants in a choreographic process. To have communicative competence within a speech community (in my case a mix of native and second language speakers of English) or a community of practice (dance-makers; see section 4.5) requires not only linguistic competence in a particular language but also an understanding of what kind of communication is *appropriate* in a given situation, i.e., knowledge of what to say, how, when and to whom (Saville-Troike, 2003:18). My analysis of actual communicative events in the rest of chapter 4 is, in effect, an attempt to draft a definition of communicative competence in the contemporary dance community. By tracing the boundaries of appropriateness in various situations we can see how that definition differs between dancers and choreographers, and in comparison with other communities.

Communicative competence implies smooth, “normal” unfolding of communicative events and can therefore be most conspicuous by its absence. Following communicative norms only results in perceived competence if norms are shared between participants, which may well not be the case in a multilingual, international or otherwise heterogeneous group. Contextualisation conventions, specific to varying situations and acquired through a lifetime of interactive experience, direct our interpretations of what is being communicated; when experiences differ, so do conventions and interpretations, which may result in communication breakdown (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 1982:17-18). Constructing social processes in interaction requires communicative cooperation that cannot take place without a “shared repertoire of contextualization conventions” (Günthner, 2008:56).

Sections 4.2 and 4.3 focus on shared communicative conventions around verbal versus nonverbal communication while section 4.4 asks, among other things, what happens to cooperation if conventions, and thus behavioural expectations, are not fully shared between actors. Assuming that “our knowledge or expectations of [communicative] events play an important part in our interpretation of what transpires”, and that “this knowledge becomes part of the interpretive frames or schemata that channel our understanding” (Gumperz & Gumperz-Cook, 2006:69), we can predict that dancers from different (dance) backgrounds with different (dance) experiences will interpret situations differently. These differences in understanding may result in communication breaking down, and they certainly affect the dancers’ ability to work together.

Most of the time, however, we are so used to sharing our interpretative frames with our communities that we hardly pay any attention to them. For example,

the daily movement through time, event to event, is part of the essential communicative knowledge of when an event is happening, how a shift in activity is taking place and is recognizable as such, how such a shift becomes a new context which tells what to expect next, and how to interpret what is said.

(Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 2006:71)

Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz are referring to classroom interaction, but this knowledge of how and when to pass from one activity to another is equally important in any institutional context, dance companies included.<sup>33</sup> Improvisation shifts into set movement sequences; a section is repeated until it is time to move on to the next one;

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<sup>33</sup> In fact, dance companies are in many ways comparable to classrooms: they tend to have one leader (teacher/choreographer), they communicate mainly face-to-face, and there is often even an explicitly “educational” element to their routines in the form of company class. This is also reflected in turn-taking practices. In a classroom context, John Sinclair and Malcolm Coulthard (1992) have identified the three-part event of 1) teacher’s question (and choosing a respondent), 2) student’s answer and 3) teacher’s confirmation (or rejection) of the answer. This is very similar to a choreographer giving dancers a task, dancers performing the task and the choreographer giving them feedback (which can range from a simple acknowledgement “good” or a more critical “again” to lengthy corrections).

talking becomes doing becomes talking, etc. Understanding these transitions, as well as all the other contextualisation conventions of their profession, is central to how dancers and choreographers make sense of their working practices, and any prospective member of the professional dance community has to learn them (see also 4.5).

We can think of the context of communication in terms of the previous experience of the individuals communicating, but context is also constantly emerging. Each action creates the context for subsequent actions. Human action, including communicative action, is cooperative and distributed: “subsequent (and simultaneous) action is built by performing systematic operations on the sign complexes made publicly available by others” (Goodwin, 2011:183). These sign complexes consist of a combination of different modalities, variously employed and oriented to by the actors. Since there is a normative orderliness to communicative events that accounts for the sequence in which turns occur (Kasper, 2009), actors (speakers, interactants, communicators) are held accountable for their turns – if they do not follow the expected order they are likely to be called on their behaviour.<sup>34</sup>

Conversation analysis studies “naturally occurring” interaction in order to understand the reasoning behind and competencies required for producing and interpreting talk “in organized sequences of interaction” (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008:12). In other words, conversation analysts are interested in the principles that make face-to-face communication possible. I was attracted to conversation analysis as an approach to interaction for three reasons. Firstly, Jefferson’s (2004) established and well-

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<sup>34</sup> Probably the most commonly cited example of sequence order is questions followed by answers, but really the same orderliness extends to all communication, and stepping out of sequence tends to have consequences in the form of repair mechanisms such as repetition.



documented set of transcription conventions provide an accessible model for transcribing recordings (see 3.3.1 and Appendix D). Secondly, a significant subset of conversation analytic research already focuses on interaction in professional/institutional contexts (see Heritage & Drew, 1992). Finally, with its sociological roots and emphasis on interaction as an embodied phenomenon (see Streeck et al., 2011), conversation analysis is a closer relative to my non-linguistic approach to communication in communities of practice than sociolinguistic methodologies.

The importance of a multimodal, embodied view of interaction should be emphasised here. A transcript of talk in a dance rehearsal would leave the reader quite baffled; a transcript of actions including speech is much more representative of the reality of interaction in the studio. Not only are (inter)actions “constructed through the simultaneous use of multiple semiotic resources” such as gestures and references to the environment (Streeck et al., 2011:1). As has already been mentioned, “the production of meaning emerges through a collaborative process of co-construction” (Goodwin, 1995:252) which includes making use of the participants’ physical bodies and environmental cues as sources of information to organise mutual orientation (Goodwin, 1986:29). Dancers and choreographers organise their actions through a combination of different media, including speech, gestures, gaze, orientation in space and to objects (props, models, charts, notes), sounds and music, and so on. As impossible as it may be to faithfully represent all of these aspects in transcription and analysis, they must at least be acknowledged.

Like ethnography, conversation analysis deals with rich layers of detail and is often conducted on small data samples and case studies (Peräkylä, 2011), and combining the

two is not a unique proposition. Anthropologist Michael Moerman (1987) has argued for the usefulness of conversation analysis in providing ethnographers with access to the meanings and social structure that are continuously constructed in conversation as it happens. While it is important to acknowledge, as Moerman does, that the formal characteristics of conversation have no one-to-one functional equivalents, “culturally contexted conversation analysis” (1987:xi) can show how for example social categories are produced in the moment of interaction. Interrupting and talking on top of others could be a sign of aggression or eager agreement, and simply noticing the overlap cannot reveal its function. Noticing it and interpreting it in context, however, can tell us what social action is being performed and thus something about the relationship between the speakers. On the other hand, sociologist Douglas W. Maynard (2006) proposes that ethnography can help conversation analysts to control their transcript-based interpretations and guide the selection of details to study, thus guarding against data loss. To summarise, the object of my focus on interaction is to balance out “an ethnographic insider’s depiction of substance” with social constructionist attention to “the *how* of social life – the methods implicit in talk and interaction whereby social actors sustain the substantive sense that life has” (Maynard, 2006:62).

Ethnography being the main methodology that determined the methods of data collection, my research cannot satisfy the rigorous data requirements for ethnomethodological analysis (see Heath, 2011). It can, however, accompany real-time observations and interview data with preliminary findings and further suggestions for using video to analyse interaction in choreographic processes.

### 3.4 Ethical issues

The main ethical issues raised by this project were to do with negotiating access, acquiring informed consent from the participants and making sure that potential lack of anonymity does not cause harm to them. A further ethical question that arose during fieldwork was the reciprocity, or lack thereof, of ethnographic research: what can I give back to the professional communities that provide me with data, and how much should I let this guide my research?<sup>35</sup> This section will briefly discuss each of these problems and how I have dealt with them.

#### 3.4.1 *Access and consent*

My access to both case studies was through the choreographers as “organizational gatekeepers” (Plankey-Videla, 2012). Mutual acquaintances suggested them to me as potential participants, I contacted the choreographers, and they granted me permission to attend the process.<sup>36</sup> This raises questions about the dancers’ autonomy should they have wished to refuse consent in a situation where the choreographer had already granted me access to the process. While I sought and gained written consent from all participants, there was little I could do to make sure that they had a genuine possibility to opt out of the study. No one withdrew their consent, although one dancer could not be reached for an interview afterwards, but the dancers probably thought, as I had done, that it was the choreographer’s prerogative to decide the parameters of the process, including who is allowed to visit or take part.

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<sup>35</sup> This question is prominent in organisational ethnography commissioned by the organisation but ethically relevant to all ethnographic research.

<sup>36</sup> These were not the only choreographers I contacted, but the others, for various reasons, refused.

This does not mean that the dancers could or would not have refused to participate in my research if they wished; it merely explains why they were likely to accept the choreographer's decision to have me in the room as one among many decisions that the choreographer makes and the dancers accept, adapt to, or take for granted. Furthermore, formal consent can be very much a formality to the participants. I negotiated with the choreographers to find a good time for signing consent forms during my first day(s) in the process, made sure I got a signature from everyone and gave them copies to keep – and then found some of those copies lying around, abandoned, during the following days. More important was the participants' informal acceptance of my presence, gained gradually as the research progressed. I entered the processes pre-approved by the choreographers and thus could expect some level of acceptance by default – I had, by association, some institutional status – but that acceptance had to be built into trust on a more personal level.

Another consideration regarding consent is how much information about the research the participants need in order to give informed consent, bearing in mind that that information can and most likely will affect their behaviour and that the objectives of the study may change even after fieldwork has ended (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:57, 210-212). To avoid deception by failure to reveal (Schrag, 2009) I described the purpose of the research briefly but truthfully both in the consent form (see Appendix A), in conversation with the choreographers while negotiating access and in my introduction to the dancers at the beginning of each process. A positive result of this was the insight it gave me into what the participants think of as communication (my stated topic), but it sometimes steered my conversations with them noticeably towards what they thought I would be interested in. I also tried to answer the participants' questions about my research, but this was not always easy to do. On the

one hand, I did not wish to make the participants overly aware of their behaviour and self-conscious in my presence. On the other hand, considering that I attempted an inductive research approach and often had myself no clear idea of the direction of the research, it was difficult to come up with findings to share while still in the middle of fieldwork.

O'Reilly (2009:176) suggests that “[t]rust is linked to how much is disclosed about the research and therefore how much research participants can trust us”. In effect, I was asking the participants for the same kind of blind initial trust that the choreographers were asking of the dancers, only perhaps even more so (see 4.4.3 for more on trust in the choreographic process). The process of gaining access to people and earning their trust is, in fact, an important learning experience for the researcher (O'Reilly, 2009:177). What the participants were comfortable sharing and what they perhaps did not want me to see was information about their community that became part of my data. My overall experience was one of openness. I was very rarely asked to turn off my camera and when I was, it was for tasks that were likely to show the dancers as their private rather than their professional selves; I was, however, allowed to film them in various informal situations even though it was sometimes clear that they were aware of letting me see and, more importantly, record behaviour (jokes, playing around) that they might not describe as “professional”.

### *3.4.2 Anonymity*

How can the participants be afforded a sufficient degree of anonymity in the research, both with respect to the publication of the results and within the group studied? This has been a serious concern in my research: in analysing people's professional

relationships I do not wish to and have no right to harm those relationships. Especially some parts of the interviews, given in confidence, have had to be dealt with accordingly. At the beginning of the project I was planning to quote the interviewees under their real names, considering that they were to be interviewed as experts in their field, but while some participants were happy to be named, others understandably had reservations. My participant consent form states that full anonymity cannot be guaranteed, but for those who wish to remain anonymous to have as much protection as possible, no one is referred to by name. Even so, they may be recognised by their colleagues and possibly within the wider dance community: ethnographic research carried out in a small number of settings usually produces too much detail to remain completely unattributable (Murphy and Dingwall, 2001). To reduce recognisability, I have avoided detailed descriptions of the works and the companies; to minimise any adverse consequences to the participants of being identified, I have kept confidential not only information that was given to me off the record but any events and responses that could be interpreted as private. Ultimately I can only hope that the participants do not feel misrepresented by my view of events.

### *3.4.3 Giving something back*

Peter Collins (2010:241) describes fieldwork as “a matter of give and take”, an aspect that I was keenly aware of when the participants showed interest in my work. The process of being observed and especially interviewed by an outsider gave the participants an unusual chance to reflect on their practice and identities. They sometimes showed surprise at my questions and even surprised themselves with their answers, so they may have learnt something new about their own ideas during the interviews. That they sometimes asked me to not use some of their answers suggests

that they also took the opportunity to voice thoughts that do not necessarily have an outlet in their work environment.

More problematically, the participants were sometimes curious about my findings and mentioned their hope that my results would be of use to the dance community. I found their questions difficult to answer because I did not and do not consider it the purpose of this research to suggest improvements. A few comments that some of the dancers made about my role were quite revealing: one of them suggested that it might be boring for me to observe a process that had no conflicts to speak of, while another one mentioned that it is probably good for me to observe a process in which a variety of sometimes peculiar or “dated” methods are used and which brings up a lot of questions for the dancers. Both comments imply what I found to be a more general conception among dancers: communication is associated with problems. My research was deemed valuable by some because it could disclose “bad” communication and promote “good” communication. I felt the weight of this expectation quite strongly, and should emphasise that my research is not critical ethnography. It cannot and does not seek to prescribe how dancers and choreographers should work together. Hopefully, however, I have provided a description of choreographic processes that my participants can recognise and tools for reflection for dancers and choreographers in general.

### 3.5 Methodological reflections

My research deals with a small sample of dance professionals in two pragmatically selected case studies, and I am aware of the challenge this presents in terms of the generalisability of my findings. As an ethnographer I am, after all, “overtly researching one group or sample as a ‘case’ that is illustrative of something broader” while hoping

that my study can attain “wider relevance” (O’Reilly, 2009:194). Due to the reflexive nature of ethnographic research “no study is formally or perfectly repeatable” (Davies, 1999:90). Its reliability, then, lies on the one hand in maintaining an awareness of the inevitable inconsistencies in the data and on the other hand in understanding that while the data is unique, the ethnography can still be critically compared to other ethnographies to determine which combination of findings seems the most reliable for the time being.

It seems likely that some of my conclusions would apply to other dancers, choreographers, dance companies and choreographic processes, but it is difficult to say which ones. They might be valid for companies of a similar size, gender balance, language, age, dance style or some other variable, but such claims would be hard to justify. Ethnographic case studies can, however, become part of a wider conversation. My findings can be tools for explaining and perhaps verifying or falsifying claims made about dancer-choreographer relationships and choreographic processes in general, although not for predicting how any particular process or relationship will play out (Davies, 1999:90-91).

As both interviewer and observer I studied instances of interaction that I was more or less overtly contributing to. I was part of the “participation framework” (see Goodwin, 2007) of the rehearsal situation, and therefore it is important to acknowledge not only the uniqueness of my material but the influence of my subjective experience on the research. As Davies (1999:5) explains,

the relationships between ethnographer and informants in the field, which form the bases of subsequent theorizing and conclusions, are expressed through social interaction in which the ethnographer participates; thus ethnographers help to construct the observations that become their data.



It is obvious that interview data are constructed between the interviewer and the interviewee, but to an extent the same is true of all observations I made. Even though the participants seemed not to pay much attention to me and sometimes temporarily forgot or lost track of me, they were still aware of my presence, as evidenced by the occasional “did you film that?” or “what are you writing down?” Most of the time, however, they did not have the need or the opportunity to follow what I was doing, at least judging by how often they ended up standing right in front of me and my camera while facing the other way.

Davies (1999:85) notes that because the ethnographer tests her interpretations by getting to know the participants better, achieving validity is less problematic for ethnographic than for other kinds of social research. Nevertheless, in interview research the researcher should be alert to the possibility that the interview situation itself may influence what the interviewees say and in observational research remain aware that field notes and their interpretations are constructed from the point of view of the researcher rather than the participants (Peräkylä, 2011:366). The validity of ethnographic research relies on the researcher’s ability to reflect on these different points of view and openly acknowledge and question any cultural perspectives that might reflect preconceived notions instead of the data. The issue of power in the dancer-choreographer relationship presented a particular challenge in this respect. It is difficult not to be sympathetic to the appeals for dancer empowerment in the field, but as soon as I begun to question the premises of those appeals, I was in equal danger of attaching myself to the cause of undermining them.

For detailed analysis of interaction such as conversation analysis, different measures of validity are needed. These include comparing the researcher’s interpretation to how

the next speaker interprets a given turn, and examining deviant cases, that is, exceptions to any established pattern (Peräkylä, 2011). My methodological issues, however, were primarily those of reliability: the recordings made for this research, while extensive, were not filmed with exacting social scientific analysis in mind but more as a form of note-taking. Any detailed analysis of the recordings depended on finding clips that would have happened to capture an interaction with reasonable accuracy. While it would not be unusual to pursue conversation analysis on single cases, studying how any particular identified pattern of interaction is realised by the participants (Arminen, 2009:52), my material was not suited to such analysis. Consequently my findings are mainly to do with illustrating the complexity of the recorded communication events and the challenge of representing them accurately.

## 4. Analysis

This chapter presents my observations of interaction and organisation in contemporary choreographic processes divided into five related, overlapping themes: communication (4.1), dancers' agency (4.2), choreographers as leaders (4.3), cooperation, collaboration and trust (4.4), and sense-making in communities of practice (4.5). Each section also includes a description or transcript of an actual event from a case study. The examples are used to illustrate the theme of each section and the complexity of interaction in general.

### 4.1 Communication in the choreographic process

#### 4.1.1 Example 1: Asking for a cue

The company is going through the piece checking transitions, spacing and timing under the direction of the choreographer. One section finished, the choreographer asks if everyone is happy with the transitions. In response, RepD5 asks for a cue to start his duet with RepD6, which take place at the same time as another phrase (a trio).<sup>37</sup>

**VChor** *can I have sociocratic phrase ↑again please?*

The dancers go to their starting positions. The choreographer tells RepD6 and RepD5 to get ready with the poles they use in the duet.

**VChor** [...] *so get ready there and mark through for me ↑please*

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<sup>37</sup> The trio started life as the unison phrase of Example 4 (4.4.1). At some point the choreographer coined the handle “sociocratic phrase”, sociocracy being a concept that was referred to at various points throughout the process.

The first trio dancer starts the phrase and exhales loudly when the other two should join him, which they do. The duet dancers have walked to their starting positions.

**VChor** *carry ↑on that's it mark through (.) ( ) spacing ( ) carry on*  
*((waves at the duet dancers to get back to the side as trio dancers move towards them))*  
*carry on*  
*((points at duet dancers))*  
*°show me your first movement°*

Trio continues to dance.

**RepD5** *um ((shuffles, turns towards RepD6))*

**VChor** *°first movement°*

**RepD6** *um ((moves quickly into position))*

The duet dancers do their first move (throwing the poles).

**VChor** *( ) ((to duet)) here (.) ((to all)) okay stay there*

The trio stops as well, everyone pauses for a moment.

**VChor** *((takes a step towards the dancers and back))*  
*carry on °carry on°*

Both the trio and the duo continue dancing.

**VChor** *no no stay there ( ) poles*  
*((points hand at RepD6 & RepD5, takes a step forward))*

The duo stops and turns to look at the trio as they continue to dance.

**VChor** *okay carry ↑on*

The trio marks through the phrase, doing approximations of floor movements standing up.

**VChor** *carry on*

*((points finger in the direction of the trio and moves it with them))*

*this is your cue to start*

*((walks towards the dancers))*

*so [RepD4] and [RepD3] can you mark through on the floor for me please*

*((steps backwards away from the dancers))*

RepD4 and RepD3 take their positions on the floor.

**VChor** *[RepD6] and [RepD5] this is your cue. Go*

RepD4 and RepD3 start the phrase.

**VChor** *((points towards RepD6 and RepD5))*

*get ready to throw the poles (.) and throw*

RepD6 and RepD5 start their duet.

**VChor** *↑yeah?*

**RepD5** *yeah*

**VChor** *carry on carry on mark through*

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This example, mundane as it is, illustrates various prominent features of communication in the rehearsal studio. Perhaps most obviously, writing the events down produces a static and lengthy account of what was in reality a quick episode full of action. The point of view is limited, focusing on the actions of the choreographer (much like the dancers are focusing their attention on him). What is said in the situation gives little idea of what is actually happening, and since the dancers hardly say a word, the exchange appears rather one-sided, even though the dancers as listeners are just as necessary to the interaction as the choreographer. The little that is said gets frequently repeated – the choreographer’s “carry on” punctuates the nonverbal action and reminds

the reader that the transcript is a very partial description of events in that it does not describe the actions that are carried on in any meaningful detail. (To do so would require advanced movement notation or other visual aids, and add considerably to the length and complexity of the transcript.)

The focus on spoken words in the description also highlights the indexicality inherent in all interaction and perhaps particularly so in choreographic processes. Not only are deictic expressions ('this', 'there') referring to movement or spatial relations used to pass on crucial information (the dancer asked for a cue; the choreographer's verbal response is "this is your cue"). According to ethnomethodologists, indexicality pervades "all linguistic and other semiotic resources" so that their meaning is always assigned locally, in the context of previous turns in the interaction as well as wider social structures (Kasper, 2009:4). When the choreographer says "no, no, stay there, poles" we need to know the context – that there are five people dancing, two of whom have poles – to understand that he is telling the duet dancers to stop dancing. A wave of the hand is an unmistakeable sign for dancers who are waiting to get out of the way of dancers who are dancing, but only in the current situation. As Gabriele Kasper (2009:4) puts it, "context and action are reflexively linked, or mutually constitutive". In the cacophony of potential signs that is human action we use context to orient our attention to the signs that matter. Sometimes we get it wrong, like the choreographer telling dancers to carry on, meaning the trio, and the duo thinking he meant everyone. This change in the situation calls for a new turn – to tell the duet dancers to stop – and so (inter)action continues in this reiterative way.

Some of the symbols used indicate how speech varies in volume (°quiet°), intonation (↑rising) or rhythm (breaks (.) between words). Movement analysis could show similar

variation in nonverbal means of communication, but for the purposes of this study it is enough to draw attention to one particular movement modality: marking. A low-energy way of suggesting movements in time and space without performing them fully, marking is a useful, even essential mode of communication in a process that requires abundant repetition of physically taxing actions. Depending on its purpose, marking can vary between discreet “notes to self” and an almost full performance. Here it provides information that the choreographer needs in order to make a decision about timing.

The whole example is, in effect, a quick succession of decisions-turned-directives made by the choreographer. Particularly without the dancers’ movements as reference points it depicts the choreographer as a manager telling the dancers what to do and when, although the initiative for this episode came from one of the duet dancers, who needed a cue. The choreographer then had to make a decision about timing, and asked the dancers for the information he needed to make it. As soon as the decision was announced (“and throw”) by the choreographer and executed by the dancers, the choreographer asked for confirmation that he had answered the dancer’s question and that the decision was clear and received verbal confirmation from the dancer.

I will return to choreographers as decision-makers in 4.3, and to the dancers’ nonverbal role in interaction in 4.2. The purpose of the current chapter is to give an overview of communication as it relates to organisation in choreographic processes, with particular reference to my case studies. I will look at who communicates, where and when, how and why, and what about, tracing some of the “components of communication” (Hymes, 2010), and draft a definition of communication as the participants understand it.

#### *4.1.2 From first rehearsal to curtain call*

A process implies a progression from a beginning to an end result. For the purposes of this research, the beginning of a choreographic process is the beginning of the rehearsals with dancers and the end the premiere of the work created, but of course ideas and plans precede rehearsals and the pieces continue to transform through rehearsals and performances after the opening night. What I have observed could perhaps be more accurately described as the rehearsal stage of a choreographic process, within which various (communicative) events take place. Their order is not fixed, they often overlap and some last for a long time while others are passed through quickly. These events also vary in kind from process to process, choreographer to choreographer, company to company, but some types of events emerged as typical ways of organising work in both processes observed. They include briefings about the piece and plans for rehearsals, tasks for generating and adapting movement material, directing and cleaning the material, joining scenes together and running longer sequences or the whole piece (“full out” or walking through/marking), and feedback sessions (notes), typically after a run of some kind. Mostly these events originate with the choreographer, although many can also be initiated by the dancers or the rehearsal director. Various events can take place simultaneously in the same room or in different rooms, and with or without the choreographer (and/or rehearsal director).

Depending on the type of process and the choreographer’s way of working, almost any rehearsal event can take place at almost any point during the process, but discussions about the origins of the work and tasks to generate material are more common at the beginning of the process whereas longer runs with notes are only possible towards the end. There is also a shift in how verbal and nonverbal modes of working intertwine.



Roughly put, separate events of talking (discussions about the piece) and doing (fulfilling tasks) become a simultaneous mix of talking and doing (directing/joining) in the middle of the process and return to separate events (runs and notes) towards the end.

The rehearsal process and the resulting dance work are surrounded by written communication – project proposals, funding applications, job contracts, probably programme notes, usually a title, perhaps a newspaper critique – but the dance studio is among the increasingly few work environments where the vast majority of daily interaction happens face-to-face and speech generally rules over writing. Furthermore, as we saw in Example 1, nonverbal communication, important in any face-to-face situation, is often inseparable from the accompanying utterances and can even replace them completely. Movement can fulfil syntactic functions within speech and replace speech turns; indeed, we should simply talk about turns since speech is not necessary for accomplishing one.<sup>38</sup> While nonverbal turns are common in everyday life, they may be even more so in choreographic processes where movement in time and space forms a significant topic of discussion. (This is not to say that verbal communication is not ever-present and very necessary in choreographic processes.)

Although most of the interaction happens face-to-face, information is also distributed and stored in writing, drawings, charts, models and, more or less daily, video recordings. The various media are, however, typically used in conjunction with face-to-face interaction rather than to replace it. Communication in and around the

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<sup>38</sup> Nick J. Enfield (2011) uses the word “move” instead of “turn” to encompass all modalities. In his definition, a move is “a unit contribution of communicative behaviour constituting a single, complete pushing forward of an interactional sequence by making some relevant social action recognizable” (2011:61). In a dance context “turn” seems somewhat less likely to cause misunderstandings, but I use it to refer to any unit of communicative behaviour rather than just spoken utterances.

choreographic process does, however, extend beyond work hours and spaces. Most of the work in the case studies took place in the studio and the theatre, but there were also discussions during breaks and commutes, dressing room chat and social gatherings after work, as well as the odd email about practical and artistic issues. Occasionally solutions to the problems of the day could be found in the pub afterwards. All of these extracurricular activities contributed to group formation and development. They may also be particularly valuable as coping mechanisms at stressful points in the process.

Sometime after the initial excitement has passed and before or during the final push processes seem to go through a stage that is less clearly defined by events and more by atmosphere. The interviewees used words such as “difficult”, “deep”, “scary” and “stressful” to describe it and agreed that it “always happens”, is probably unavoidable or even necessary, and presents a challenge to communication:

*It's always this moment in a process, and you're like ah, [I] hate it, or when it's difficult and when you think it's going wrong, like they – they should do it differently [...] when there comes this deep point in a process [to get past that I] relax, telling me okay, it's always like this, it belongs to it, it needs this friction. If it would be easy the result would be different. (RepD9)*

*A lot of the time as you come to the end of a process [...] it gets stressful because you see the end and then communication breaks down. And if everyone's aware that this is something that potentially happens then it's easier to avoid. (RepD8)*

Dancers were also able to observe this phenomenon from the choreographer's point of view, recognising the pressure choreographers experience to make the right decisions:

*Every choreographer really comes to that point where it's like okay, this is the piece and it's just about to make itself known. You don't quite know what that is so it's scary, and you want more from your dancers and you want more from yourself. (RepD11)*

While communication changes in the studio and relationships may seem strained, this difficult stage was more obvious to me outside the studio. The pressure of finishing

the work in time and sudden lack of confidence in the work or one's abilities to make or perform it seem to be problems most dancers and choreographers are familiar with, but mostly they try not to let their feelings show in the studio. Instead, during stressful times pressure is often let out in discussions that take place outside rehearsals. Having an outlet for worries and complaints is a useful, if unofficial, part of the process in that it allows individuals to communicate and deal with their stress while keeping the studio time focused on pushing through the tricky bit.

#### *4.1.3 Communication as information*

We communicate not only to solve problems or present ideas but also to express emotions and build and maintain personal and professional relationships, and we do much of this unconsciously or involuntarily. We broadcast (or try to hide) our moods and feelings and we read these in other people without trying. Interaction provides us with affective information, whether accurate or not, about other people's feelings and moods, which in turn influences how we conduct ourselves. The content of communication – the information that flows between participants in a choreographic process – encompasses everything from background material for the work to the nonverbal tactile information passed between dancers while partnering, from daily task lists to vocal and physical cues. None of this information needs to be accurate or “true” to nevertheless have an impact on our choices and behaviour. For example, rumours about a colleague's (choreographer's/dancer's) abilities or personality may increase or reduce our willingness to work with them. Of course we are also influenced by factual information that may help us solve the problem at hand and enable us to make (seemingly) rational decisions.

At first glance, the tide of information in a (non-collective) choreographic process flows mainly from the choreographer to the dancers. In 4.2, I will discuss how this top-down trickle of information from people higher up in the institutional hierarchy to their employees or followers is only a part of the picture – in fact even the status difference may be non-existent or reversed – but in both case studies the choreographer was the keeper of the knowledge relating to the work. The choreographer's ideas may change and s/he most likely will not know everything about the piece at the beginning of the process, but s/he is the initiator of it, even if that initiation only consists of casting a particular group of colleagues to work on the piece.

Casting aside for the moment the wider social and political context of the choreographic process (the macrolevel of organisational behaviour) as well as the complexities of group dynamics, a basic model of communication in the choreographic process could consist of the choreographer designing events (rehearsals) that deliver to the dancers enough information about his ideas for the work to elicit a suitable physical and/or verbal response from them. This feedback enables the choreographer to further develop the piece and feed the changed information back to the dancers for a response, and so on. Several themes/scenes may be developed at the same time, and these feedback loops may get dropped altogether and new ones started throughout the process. Depending on the method of working, the information that the choreographer shares with the dancers may include exposition and questions to be addressed, different kinds of creation tasks and material to learn, edits and corrections, and it may be communicated with the help of objects, charts and drawings, and audio or video recordings. The information can be certain or provisional, plentiful or sparse, accurate or inaccurate, and it will be assimilated (or not) to the knowledge and expectations the recipients already have of the situation.

When I asked my interviewees about communication, their definitions varied and different people prioritised different aspects of it, but most of them seemed to have some idea of what constitutes desirable, “good” or “open” communication for them, as opposed to “broken” or a “lack of” communication. Some even emphasised the importance of well-functioning communication in the studio to the outcome of the process and the eventual communication with an audience:

*There needs to be communication in the studio. Open communication is vital because we need to understand each other, and if we are able to communicate well as a group we're able to better communicate outwardly, in my opinion. Dance is an art form that needs to communicate. I'm not defining what it needs to communicate but somehow the heart and soul of what we do is to communicate, and like I say, it has to happen from the ground up. (RDir)*

“Open” is here used as a positive modifier of communication that leads to understanding, but what exactly is “open communication”? At least it implies an unimpeded flow of information from the choreographer to the dancer and vice versa. A choreographer who communicates openly is willing to share what he knows, is not afraid to express his doubts and both invites and makes use of feedback. An open process is one that makes the dancers feel like they are a part of the creation, involved and acknowledged:

*I think what interests me now [...] is more the process than actually the type of work or the result of it. It's more like what can I learn during the process [...] very open process where I feel like I can communicate my ideas with the choreographer and vice versa, where I really feel involved in the development of the piece. (RepD4)*

It is interesting to note, however, that a choreographer's openness in communication or ability to create a feeling of involvement in the dancers does not automatically correlate with sharing his power to make decisions with them. Some dancers pointed out that openness can even be a kind of facade, an item to tick in the checklist for “good” processes or a calculated method to keep the dancers happy without actually

engaging them in a conversation from which both parties could emerge with altered views. It is one thing to be open *towards* one's co-workers and to share with them ideas and questions related to the process and quite another to be open to *receive* what they have to say and let that affect one's thoughts and decisions.

How much openness in either direction is necessary or beneficial seems to vary from choreographer to choreographer and dancer to dancer. Too much information can be a problem both ways: it can complicate the choreographer's decisions and confuse the dancer's focus. Open communication does not necessarily mean copious communication but rather a mutual willingness to give and receive feedback in a constructive atmosphere. Interviews with choreographers highlighted their awareness of a need to make their own decisions, to maintain a personal artistic voice in their work. One interviewee commented on the pros and cons of inviting dancers to share their opinions:

*It's a really lovely way of creating work because you're giving a voice to everyone, so that's the positive of that. But then if I put myself in [the choreographer's] shoes, he's then got ten opinions on what's just happened, and what do you do with that? If each one of those people has a different desire with what you just did, how useful is it to try and incorporate all of those things and how much does it begin to dilute what your intention is as a choreographer? (RDir)*

On the one hand the choreographer needs to have a sounding board but on the other hand he might or should be wary of letting other people "dilute" his vision. How much outside influence is too much? As for dancers, their preference for openness is modified by how much information each of them finds useful at each stage of the process and how much they personally like to feel like they are a part of the decision-making process. One dancer commented on not wanting too much information from the choreographer:

*I'm quite happy with bare bones because then I'm more able to focus, so if I have a movement task, if I have a clear objective with the task, I tend to work better kind of block to block or task to task. Too much information is interesting but I'll just kind of let it dribble away, and I'll keep it in the backburner, and I'm sure in my subconscious will try and use it when it's appropriate but I don't try and focus on it. (RepD11)*

Another one, however, preferred to know as much as possible:

*I like to work in a kind of collective where everybody is part of the creation and everybody has access to the information the choreographer has, so that the choreographer shares his ideas and his sources where he gets his information from. (RepD9)*

This quote highlights how sharing information can help to create a sense of participation, not least because it enables group members to discuss decisions and take part in making them.

While dancers' preferences vary, it seems that overall a choreographer's honesty and reciprocity – his ability to accept feedback as well as give it – are more crucial to a feeling of involvement than sharing copious amounts of information about the sources and stages of the process with the dancers. Even when some interviewees would have liked to know more or to have more structure, it was also mentioned that the choreographer can hardly share information that does not yet exist:

*It's not that he has more and he doesn't give it [information], I think. I think he has to solve his own ideas first and that's why he's not able to give clear answers because he maybe has an order but it might change. (RepD8)*

On a purely practical level the choreographer's unshared or changing plans for each working day may cause problems. The dancers are quite often uncertain of what they will be asked to do next and have limited opportunities to plan how to divide their energy. Even if choreographers do their best to plan activities in advance, plans sometimes fail. Sometimes, for whatever reason, a dancer may have a period of non-movement followed by physically demanding tasks at the end of the day. Not

necessarily knowing whether she needs to stay warm and how warm, or not having the chance to warm up again, the dancer may end up underprepared for her tasks and risk injury. There are clearly types of information that have health and/or ethical implications and that should be readily available.

In summary, I would suggest that when dancers and choreographers talk about “open communication” they actually mean something like “honesty, respectful relationships and adequate information”. Lack of communication often does not actually mean that there is no communication but rather that we do not like what is being communicated: neglect, thoughtlessness, disrespect. On the other hand, “too much communication” can also be problematic even if it is “open” in nature.

*I think when communication isn't happening between people in the studio, that's when processes fail and that's when pieces fail. But I think also at the moment we're experiencing the possibility that too much communication can also make things difficult. So it's that the concept of communication is very important rather than that we need to communicate a lot. (RDir)*

The interviewee is referring specifically to discussions about the work rather than to communication in general. Group discussions can be, for want of a better word, empowering for the participants and produce useful ideas, but they can also be time-consuming and aimless, and time, as I will discuss next, tends to be a very limited commodity in choreographic processes.

#### *4.1.4 Optimising the process*

Creation periods for contemporary dance works are often much shorter than the makers would like. Lack of time can be a constant pressure felt by dancers and choreographers alike, and it has a definite effect on how they communicate and think about



communication during the process. One dancer regretted not having enough time to follow through with tasks and to work on the material with the choreographer:

*We don't have enough time to really follow a task and really present something, and it's not enough time to work on it, so actually we would need more time first to get into it, to feel it, and to set something by ourselves, work on it choreographically even for us before then coming to [the choreographer]. I feel a bit it's 'okay, do the task and present something', and we keep it, but there are steps [that] are missing, and this might be because of the little time. We trialled a lot, we go in so many different fields. Maybe this is also the problem – maybe it would be easier to stay with one. Just less tasks but then give more time for each to dive in deeply. (RepD9)*

This dancer regrets that unfinished material ends up in the final piece due to lack of time. Here another one laments the wasted time and energy when the choreographer trials many ideas only to discard them:

*I don't like to feel that I lose my energy for something that is not seriously important, for example just using the dancers to figure out if something is really working and abusing their body and brain in a repetitive way so that the choreographer has an idea what it might be, and then he actually throws this away and changes it all over. This is so inefficient, [you] just made the dancers tired instead of really thinking what you want with it, where do you wanna go with it. It's kind of questioning yourself before you make others struggle so much. (RepD8)*

Waste of time and energy is not only a concern for the dancers but also for the choreographers who have to decide how much they need to and want to share their thoughts with the dancers, how to word the tasks and direction they give, and when to invite opinions and questions:

*Sometimes in process I have the feeling that I have too many things to say for the little time that we have, so sometimes I don't say it and we get on with things. Probably I would like to research how to communicate things economically, in a way that you invest very little time, very little effort, to get the maximum results. (VChor)*

In a constant hurry, the choreographer may try to share too much information too soon, and try too many things at once, making it difficult for the dancer to judge what is

important and what she should be focusing on. Awareness of the limited time available pushes choreographers to carefully manage their use of that time:

*I feel like I could do with another four weeks. And being mindful of not having [one of the dancers on certain days], [...] So I really got to try and judge what the best next thing to do is so that I don't start duplicating once he comes back, so that what we do without him is all stuff that's useful, rather than stuff that we could just do when he's here. (PChor)*

Aware of the tight schedule, the dancer has to evaluate the importance and relevance of her questions and decide whether there is time to ask them. There is little time for losing track, missing an instruction and asking for it to be repeated. Lengthy discussions about the work, while potentially useful to some, may seem like a waste of precious time to others.

Communication under time pressure requires concentration and clarity. According to one dancer, on a day to day basis clear tasks are much more useful than detailed explanations about the choreographer's vision for the piece in general:

*I don't think a choreographer necessarily has to explain everything [...] they're setting out to achieve. I think what's important is that the communication on each individual day, each individual hour, each task, is really clear. This is so much more important than them coming in and explaining the piece for a day in absolute minute detail and then the next day when we start working them to set really vague tasks and be really unclear about what they're after. (RepD3)*

While acknowledging that it is good to ask questions if a task is too vague, another interviewee emphasised that it is important for the dancers to stay focused during rehearsals in order to avoid unnecessary clarifying questions that would slow the process down:

*It's really important to be really clear on what you're doing but sometimes that just happens by being really present in the room, because there are some questions that I've witnessed that are like well we just talked about that. (RDir)*

When asked what interests them about communication, one choreographer mentioned the economy of his instructions and a dancer the productivity of the tasks a choreographer gives. Overall, it seems that economy and clarity, efficiency and productivity are key concerns in the way communication shapes choreographic processes, and that the time pressures that enforce these concerns are to some extent created by the financial and organisational context in which dance companies exist. This is a problem shared by organisations in many fields: how to maintain or even improve quality of work while battling with inadequate resources.

Tight production schedules are an influential factor in how choreographic processes should be conducted, but effective and economic communication can also be seen as part of the skill-set of any professional. Dancers need to read bodies and movement fluently. When someone demonstrates a movement they should repeat, they need to be able to quickly analyse what is relevant about the movement shown. A lay person in a dance class would struggle to copy a sequence because she does not recognise what is typical or particular about it. To use a language metaphor, she sees and hears the same information as the more experienced dancer but because she does not speak the language of that particular genre of dance, the sequence is like a sentence in an unknown language: meaningless and difficult to remember, never mind repeat. When all information, every detail, has equal newness status, learning takes a lot of effort. A trained dancer analyses the same sequence as elements she is already familiar with, combined in standardised ways, and can quickly pick out any patterns that are new and unfamiliar and focus on learning those. Similarly the dancer's training and experience enables her to take nonverbal direction from the choreographer. From a choreographer's demonstration of "more like this", she is able to recognise the difference to what she has been doing, whether it is a change in direction, scale, quality

or something else, and reproduce the corrected version. Determining relevance requires a pre-existing knowledge of the language spoken, or the kind of movement practised.

Yet another aspect of economy is working as much as and only as much as is needed to accomplish the desired goal. As mentioned in 4.1.1, marking instead of performing movements in full is a way to save the dancers' energy and allow for more repetitions in rehearsals, but it also has a significant communicative function. To show the choreographer the relevant aspects of the section they are marking, the dancers need to know which dimensions of movement are essential information and which can be ignored. Towards the end of the rehearsal period of the Repertory Production, more and more time was allocated to dealing with issues of timing and spacing. Scenes were often marked through to check both, which requires the dancers to accurately assess how much of the material they need to repeat and how much effort to put into it in order to achieve a realistic result in terms of where they are at each point in time. The dancers need to be skilled in distilling their movement to what is relevant for each section and each rehearsal if they are to produce a useful summary of their actions for the choreographer to work on, as well as to learn from the repetition for performance.

#### *4.1.5 Communication is the choreographic process*

There is no question of the importance of communication in choreographic processes; indeed, it is difficult to imagine how any group of people could work together without some form of communication. In varying amounts, choreographers relate their sources of inspiration and vision of the work to their dancers, give them creative tasks or material to learn and direct their efforts as the piece takes shape. The dancers ask

questions and make suggestions based on the information they have been given, and have varying preferences for what and how much they would like to know at any point during the process. From discussions about what a piece might communicate to an audience to details of timing and spacing – and much of the process, from setting movement sequences to finalising cues, is overtly or ultimately about timing and spacing – communication about the piece happens on many levels. At the same time interpersonal relationships are also negotiated: trust is built and lost, hierarchies established and dismantled, arguments resolved, compromises reached. In other words, a choreographic process is constructed.

According to the so called “communication-as-constitutive” (CCO) perspective found in organisation studies,

[communication] is the means by which organizations are established, composed, designed, and sustained. Consequently, organizations can no longer be seen as objects, entities, or ‘social facts’ inside of which communication occurs. Organizations are portrayed, instead, as ongoing and precarious accomplishments realized, experienced, and identified primarily – if not exclusively – *in* communication processes.

(Cooren et al., 2011:1150, emphasis original)

Communication is not only a manifestation of organisation but rather communication *is* the organisation. The ethnomethodological view is that institutional contexts such as classrooms and surgeries, and social order in general, choreographic processes included, are “*talked into being*” (Heritage, 1984:290, emphasis original). Acknowledging that interaction is embodied and that nonverbal communication has a significant role in interaction, we could say that choreographic processes and dance companies are acted or communicated into being. Communication is an essential means of working together – of leading and following, agreeing and disagreeing, collaboration and conflict. For dancers and choreographers, communication enables

the negotiating, influencing, making and questioning decisions and solving problems of all types and sizes that, in the end, amount to a performance of a dance work.

Communication is constitutive of the whole social event that is a choreographic process: the different types of processes (e.g. choreographer-led/collaborative, improvised/composed), the different stages in those processes (creating, editing, rehearsing, etc.), the relationships and hierarchies between the participants (leaders, followers, collaborators). In order to maintain this social order, dancers and choreographers need the interactive competence to make relevant and appropriate contributions to the process – but they also decide what is considered relevant and appropriate behaviour in their profession and in any particular process. A dance rehearsal can be understood as an example of linguist Stephen C. Levinson's (1992: 69) concept of "activity type": a "culturally recognized activity" that may or may not coincide with or include verbal communication and that can be divided into episodes (e.g. giving out tasks, working on the tasks, checking progress, giving and receiving feedback) which are governed by norms and conventions.

Importantly, Levinson's activity types are goal-oriented, meaning that their structural properties are mostly adapted to serve those goals – in other words, people perceive the activity to have a particular goal or point and organise their behaviour towards achieving or realising it. In a choreographic process, that goal is typically a performance of the dance piece being created, and dancers and choreographers not only organise their behaviour towards getting ready to perform the work but also reflect on how their communicative behaviour affects the company's ability to successfully achieve its goals.

Related to activity types is the notion of “allowable contributions” (Levinson, 1992:71): while other communication may take place simultaneously, only certain kinds of contributions<sup>39</sup> are functionally relevant to the activity and thus “allowable” in the context of said activity. To give a crude example, a choreographer and a dancer working together on material that the dancer has created might also be discussing what they will have for lunch, but that discussion does not contribute to the task at hand and is not limited by its constraints, whereas directing, performing, editing and discussing the dance material consists of functionally fairly predictable turns, whether spoken or not. One of the structural properties that constrains allowable contributions is the role that each participant has in the group performing the activity. It is to be expected that a leader (choreographer) and a follower (dancer) have different kinds of contributions available to them.<sup>40</sup> At its simplest, this could mean that the choreographer can issue directives such as “stop” and “carry on” that are not readily at the dancer’s disposal while the dancer might have access to more questions and suggestions expressed with movement.

Making any kind of contribution is a way of creating and nurturing commitment to the project. Participation in group conversations reflects status differences within the group, with high-status members speaking and expected to speak more, and frequent participators wielding more influence (Bonito, 2000:529-530). In the case studies it was quite clear that the choreographer’s high institutional status allowed him more speaking time than the dancers but there were differences in participation among the dancers as well. Whether these were due to gender, age, experience, expertise, group

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<sup>39</sup> Levinson (1992) is referring to verbal contributions, but the rules apply to any actions.

<sup>40</sup> Other participants in or on the margins of the process – rehearsal director, technical staff, artistic director, visitors – have yet other constraints on their contributions.

size<sup>41</sup> or other characteristics is beyond the scope of this study, but the interviews gave some indication that participation levels matter to the participants themselves. Bonito (2000:531) argues that “the substance of communication allows members to form judgments about the utility of self’s and other’s contributions”. To do one’s job properly and be a useful member of the group one has to participate, and to participate substantively.

The dancers, while aware that working in a group required them to exercise discretion about when and how, if at all, to contribute to the current activity, seemed to think that given the opportunity to participate in conversation they should voice their opinions more often. Perhaps less obviously not all of them had equal opportunities to do so, because “contributing substantively depends on the possession of task-specific information” (Bonito, 2000:533). When the task is set by a choreographer, he becomes the main source of information about it. Those dancers who have a closer personal or professional relationship with the choreographer have easier access to such information, are better able to come up with relevant contributions in group conversations and consequently have a bigger chance of being perceived as useful participants in the process. If indeed “frequent participators tend to be more satisfied with their role in the process” (Bonito, 2000:536) and if participation is, as it seems to be, largely determined by speaking turns, it is no wonder that dancers may feel that they should be speaking more, although it is useful to remember that not all substantive contributions are necessarily constructive to the process.

Beyond role-related limitations, what is appropriate communication with regard to the goal of the process becomes partly a matter of priorities. As was mentioned in 4.1.4,

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<sup>41</sup> A small group may compel members to contribute more because failure to participate is easily noticed, and encourage contributions because there is less competition for turns (Bonito, 2000:548).



creation periods tend to be too short. Everyone seems to agree that time is a limited resource to be used wisely. What dancers and choreographers do not always agree on is how much discussion (talking), as opposed to rehearsing (doing), is necessary for a successful process. On the one hand, dancers and choreographers alike were aware of the need to control the time given to questions and discussion during rehearsal, perhaps by asking fewer questions or sharing fewer ideas than one would like:

*Always, if something happens, you have an opinion about it, and sometimes you want to share it but you hold back because you think 'ah, it's a big group so I cannot always say something', also to make [keep] the things going, and so I say only every thirtieth time when I think something – then I say it. (RepD9)*

Appropriate communication can also be a matter of timing it right. This applies to bigger events such as company briefings but it is equally relevant in short exchanges between individuals. A note given at the wrong time will not have the desired effect; an injudiciously timed question can derail a discussion or an entire rehearsal.

There is clearly a pressure to be careful and sparing with words in the rehearsal process but also to make sure that there are enough of them and that they are listened to. Potential communicative failures mentioned in the interviews included the choreographer being unwilling to listen to what the dancers have to say, not giving them a chance to speak out, or being unclear or even disingenuous about his/her intentions to the point of communication “breaking down”. The responsibility for much of what is perceived as “good” communication seems to lie with the choreographer, although some dancers also mentioned needing to work on their own communication skills: one dancer thought she could be more outspoken in order to “be more useful” (RepD7) while another had worked on her body language to avoid having “a negative impact in the studio because of lack of communication” (RepD11).

Although many interviewees mentioned the significance of body language as part of communication or the nonverbal aspect of their work more generally, verbal communication is clearly a very necessary medium of organising work in a choreographic process. When dancers discussed their experiences of lack of communication or broken communication, they seemed to be referring to a lack of words, harsh words, or a refusal to listen to their words. Ultimately it seems that the amount of (verbal) communication is less important than how it is conducted. Is the information relevant? Is the tone respectful?<sup>42</sup> Is the speaker honest and trustworthy – does she mean what she says and act according to her words? When dancers and choreographers talk approvingly of “open communication”, they are in effect asking for respectful communicative behaviour: everyone contributing constructively towards the common goal, and receiving others’ contributions considerately. The next section focuses specifically the contributions that dancers make to the choreographic process.

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<sup>42</sup> Disrespect was one of the main complaints dancers had about choreographers in general, not specifically in the case studies.

## 4.2 A silent partner? The dancer as a maker

Through the pain of practice, the language of ballet became available to me. With the language came the freedom and the ability to express within that particular art form. With this skill came the pleasure of belonging, of owning, for a moment, the tools of power. [...] [W]ith it came the ability to speak with my body – a silent language. There is something about the silent presence of ballet performers that haunts me. It is a silence that speaks volumes. It has agency.

(Claid, 2006:37-38)

Claid (2006) explains how feminism helped dancers acquire a verbal and political voice in the 1970s, but also finds power and agency in the dancer's ability, gained through the physical pain of practising and extending the capabilities of the body, to speak the silent language of ballet. She describes vividly the power that dancers acquire by owning and investing in the pain necessary to dancing, a power symbolised by silence (Claid, 2006:38-41). To this image I want to add a more commonplace understanding of silence as a regular feature of communication but one that we must pay attention to in order to understand the dancer's agency in the choreographic process.

This chapter examines the agency of the dancer in contemporary dance-making which, not unlike the agency of ballet performers in Claid's depiction above, can be silent and still powerful. It seems that collaborative methods of working are sometimes evoked as a means for the emancipation of dancers – a view that suggests that dancers, as a social group, are in a position of oppression (see chapter 2). According to the linguist Richard J. Watts (1997:87), “[w]henver people interact verbally, power is exercised”. The dancers' relative silence in the studio compared to the talking choreographer has been interpreted – to some extent correctly – as a sign of the imbalance of power between dancers and choreographers. That the choreographer is, by definition, in a

position of authority, is not a problem in and of itself, but authority may be abused. If we accept Parviainen's (1998:108-109) claim that dancers are trained from an early age to be disciplined and obedient and that "[m]ost well trained dancers do not question authority", we can see that any misuse of power by the choreographer might easily remain unchallenged by dancers who have been taught not to talk back to the choreographer.

Regardless of how accurate this image of the silent, disempowered dancer actually is, I think it is important to emphasise that not talking is not the same as not communicating. By describing actual communicative events in rehearsals I aim to show that the dancers' agency in making new work cannot be understood without taking into account the various kinds of nonverbal communication that take place in the choreographic process. I take my cue from communication theorists Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin Bavelas and Don D. Jackson, according to whom

[o]ne cannot not communicate. Activity or inactivity, words or silence all have message value: they influence others and these others, in turn, cannot not respond to these communications and are thus themselves communicating.

(Watzlawick et al., 1967:49)

It has been pointed out by researchers (see e.g. Rouhiainen, 2003; Roche, 2011) that in order to gain employment, a contemporary (freelance) dancer needs to master a variety of physical and expressive skills. I would like to add that she is also expected to have a particular set of communication skills that enable co-operation in a creative relationship in which power to make decisions and responsibility for the outcome are usually not shared equally. Similarly, the choreographer is expected to have leadership skills (discussed further in 4.3) that include the ability to communicate his wishes with clarity and to accept and make use of verbal and nonverbal feedback from the dancers.

I will begin by presenting a sequence of communicative events that resulted in the creation of a section of choreography in the Freelance Production, followed by a discussion of the relative silence of the dancers in this particular part of the process, the communicative potential of silence in general and the agency of the dancers in creating this section of the finished work.

Example 2 below provides an overview of the creation of one particular section of choreography, focusing on the first two days during which this section was developed. It will neither cover all instances of communication during those days nor delve deeply into any single event; rather, my aim, as with all my examples is to give an idea of how one might begin to unravel the complexities of interaction in dance-making and use them to better understand the roles and rules of the situation. Goodwin (2000:1490) argues that “the construction of action through talk within situated interaction is accomplished through the temporally unfolding juxtaposition of quite different kinds of semiotic resources”. Language in itself is a complicated phenomenon, but talk is also accompanied by various actions and frameworks such as gestures, gaze and the actors’ position and orientation in space, which need to be taken into account in order to understand communicative patterns in any given context. Some of these will be briefly noted [in square brackets].

#### *4.2.1 Example 2: From totem poles to chorus line*

A movement task involving all dancers, including the Producer-Choreographer (who will dance in the final work), has finished. PChor gets up and goes to the side of the room to check his camera and notes. The ambient music that was playing for the

previous task continues in the background throughout the rest of the day.<sup>43</sup>

[sound/music] The dancers, including FreeD3 and FreeD4 in the excerpts below, have ended up on the floor close to each other and stay there but sit up and form a sort of line. PChor returns with his notebook and sits down facing them. [orientation]

**PChor** *um, we did something last week<sup>44</sup> where I did– I’ve done it before which is something that’s probably gonna come at the end or near the end, which is a bit like a kind of chorus line [...] that we advance forward with this kind of connected thing and we all do kind of unison um*

*and I’d like (.) I’d like you to construct some  
((gestures with hands))  
that we kind of [...] something fairly simple we just kind of generate a little  
bit of movement (.) maybe kind of like eight moves (.) that’s imagining that  
there’s a  
((hands go up and down, drawing a shape))  
totem pole in front of you  
((hands gesture forward))  
and then you’re  
((keeps doing hand movements))  
describing certain parts of it  
iuu ((sound effect))  
er ((hands still moving))  
so you’re imagining the faces and the wings and the ( ) animal ( ) but you  
could– it’s quite nice if you think about carv– you’re carving the wood off it  
((hands keep going))  
and it’s kind of this thing  
((hands moving along a circle in front))  
or yeah.*

*so some kind of tracing, carving so there’s a there’s eh-a bit of tension  
through it maybe rather than just  
((does floppy hand movements from elbows onwards))  
patterning, you know, there’s something that  
((moves from the torso as well))  
shifts you so some– something kind of just (arrives) in eight– eight moves (.)  
if that makes sense*

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<sup>43</sup> The music – calm, electronic, instrumental – was chosen by one of the dancers and does not seem particular to the task at hand; a little later during this rehearsal PChor asks the dancer where the music is from, but I could not identify the artist based on the dancer’s reply. Both incidental background music and sounds of a more diegetic nature – tracks to be used in performance or to create a particular kind of atmosphere for a task – were a near-permanent feature of both of my case studies.

<sup>44</sup> PChor was doing research with other dancers the week before.

**FreeD3** *that describe the pole?*  
*((hands go up and down in front))*

**PChor** *describe a totem pole*

PChor gets up and says he will find some pictures to show for inspiration [visual media] and asks the dancers to keep the movements in front of them rather than reach out sideways, “for reasons you will find out”. He turns away and walks to the side of the room. Some of the dancers quietly exchange a few words with each other as they get up one by one and find a spot in the room to work on their own. [space] PChor tells them that they will teach their phrases to each other and asks them to bear that in mind. After a couple of minutes he adds: “and quite good if it’s got some accents in it as well, it’s quite easy for it just to become flowing but actually, the things that were more staccato were also nice”. At PChor’s comments, some of the dancers stop what they are doing and turn to look at him while others continue as they were. [orientation, gaze] The work continues without talking with music playing in the background for some minutes. PChor then offers to show pictures on his computer, and gradually each dancer makes her/his way to the pictures and back to creating the phrases, without talking. Again, a few minutes pass, and PChor notes: “you can use your legs if you want to”. Some more minutes, and the following exchange takes place:

**PChor** *can you just refine what you have rather than adding anything else on.*

**FreeD3** *say again?*

**PChor** *can you just um establish what you have, don’t add any on now.*

**FreeD3** *even if I don’t have eight?*

**PChor** *yeah ( ) fine*

**FreeD3** *if I have seven?*

*((chuckles from others))*

**PChor** *yeah seven is fine*

*((some dancers turn to talk to each other))*

**PChor** *seven of good quality*

Work continues. PChor joins the dancers on the floor and starts to work on a phrase of his own. After some more minutes the dancers begin to drift off to rest/drink/write etc. Eventually the phrases are filmed for PChor to view later. Dancers end up sitting, stretching, chatting. PChor, standing, facing the dancers, explains what the phrases are for.

**PChor** *and then we do it like shoulder to shoulder*  
*((taps his right shoulder with his left hand))*  
*so that this*  
*((snakes his right arm to the side, inwardly rotating from the shoulder))*  
*would become the other person's waist*  
*((moves his arm across his belly, repeats the movement))*  
*or this*  
*((moves right arm to the side, elbow at a straight angle, shoulder rotating outwards, repeats a couple of times))*  
*would go round the next person's head– you could send them*  
*((takes a step forward while doing a down and up snaking movement with his hand and arm))*  
*( ) so*  
*((repeats the earlier movements))*  
*everything we do starts to connect with ( ) body parts if that makes sense?*  
*and things like where you're connecting but you're falling in space*  
*((left arm raised, falls a few steps backwards))*

PChor demonstrates several more possibilities of connections and tells the dancers about a previous piece where he used a similar structure. Apart from one intern, the dancers make no comments that would be audible on the video.



The next day a longer part of the morning rehearsal is spent talking. PChor brings up the totem pole task and explains his vision for its symbolic function in the piece, talks about realism vs. symbolism and how he sees the section working. “It allows us to be watched”. PChor talks about the conventions of renaissance painting and Britney Spears, about inviting the gaze by looking away, and this section as a device for doing that. He then asks the dancers to recap what they have from yesterday, their totem phrases. Everyone gets up, chatting quietly, adjusting clothing, finding room to work. PChor says he can show them the videos from yesterday but no one takes him up on the offer.

PChor chooses FreeD4’s phrase for everyone to learn. She teaches her phrase facing the mirror, the others scattered behind, [orientation, visual aid] and explains it verbally as well (although mostly too quietly to hear on the video). She is in charge of how many movements she teaches before repeating or moving on. With each repetition she gives vocal/verbal cues to the others. After each repetition, everyone takes a few steps back – the phrase travels forward – and begins again, led by FreeD4 [non-vocal direction, space]. PChor is quite near the mirror as well [space], and asks FreeD4 questions about some of the movements.

After four and a half minutes, PChor steps towards the mirror and turns to face the dancers as they back up for another repetition [orientation]. He watches one repetition in silence and at the end of it says: “Nice. Let’s, um do it shoulder to shoulder, and have a little look at what – what kind of connections [...]”. The dancers form a line facing the mirror. PChor stands in front of them, sometimes facing them and sometimes facing the mirror, a couple of times also joining the line. He asks “what (would happen) if...”, “can we...” “shall we go...”, “would that make sense...”. The

dancers respond by trying things out and occasionally comment verbally, sometimes also suggesting something to try. PChor is not part of the line most of the time, but tries the movements himself as well. He directs vocally/verbally the beginning of repetitions (e.g. “aaand” with different inflections), the steps taken, the connections made. He modifies the movements, creating connections, adjusting directions and timing, introducing new movements (usually modelling them himself) and giving corrections to all or some of the dancers. He finds out whether his suggestions work in a line by observing the dancers try them out.

He breaks down some of the movements, explaining where the weight is, how the twist happens. “Think more about...” “I think you need to...” “You still wanna go through...” “Wait for yourself to be sent...” PChor is the main vocal presence in the room. Throughout repetitions of the phrase he “makes noises” to mark rhythm and cue certain movements. A few times he asks FreeD4 what comes next in her phrase or how she did a particular movement; she responds by showing and later on also verbally.

**PChor** *what happens from there?*

**FreeD4** *((inaudible, shows the next movements))*

**PChor** *((tries the movement))*

*I think I might have to change the— keep the arm in relation to the back but change the back, so that the arm comes forwards*

*((showing all the while))*

*[...] let's open up that leg then. what's the=where's the arm going?*

**PChor** *I feel like I could do another*

*((everyone trying out snaky arms))*

**PChor** *do you step forward on that leg?*

**FreeD4** *um (.) I didn't but we can*  
*((does the arm movement while taking steps forward, others copy))*

**PChor** *((copies as well))*  
*( ) I think do that (.) can you let the legs slide but the finger lead?*  
*((while showing))*

The dancers are trying out the material FreeD4 gives and the changes PChor makes, mostly without talking, although they do ask a few questions. When there's a slight pause, they start to try out ways to connect to each other at the end of the snaky arm. Before moving from one bit to the next, PChor often says "nice" or gives other feedback. PChor asks them to repeat the whole phrase a couple of times while he watches and gives vocal cues, before breaking for lunch.

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PChor used the same task in research the week before. Back then the chorus line phrases were built by the dancers from a combination of all their movements and the dancers were asked to do much of the initial joining together of the material. They taught their phrases to each other and joined them into a longer phrase, connecting side by side, on their own, before PChor started to modify the movements. This time, however, the choreographer selects only one phrase for everyone to learn and takes an active role in the joining of the line. FreeD4's role is different from the other dancers in this section of the rehearsal, first because she is in charge of teaching the phrase and then because she is consulted about her original phrase while the modifications are made. At first, she is in front of everyone else, showing them what to do and helping them with verbal cues. That she is only temporarily in charge becomes apparent when PChor steps away from the group and turns to watch them, thus signalling a shift towards the next stage of the process. By saying "nice" after the last repetition of the

phrase, he reclaims his initiative. At the same time, FreeD4's phrase shifts from her control into common (or the choreographer's) property. When PChor asks FreeD4 "do you step forward on that leg?" FreeD4 responds "*I* didn't but *we* can" (emphasis added). PChor then picks up her physical suggestion for the stepping forward and immediately modifies it.

Most of the other dancers' totem pole phrases don't make it into the piece. Phrases from earlier research are added to the sequence, which keeps growing until quite late in the process. The chorus line is performed twice: in silence as the piece begins, and with piano music at the very end of the work. Unlike the rest of the piece, this section is in strict unison, and requires a lot of rehearsing and an outside eye to get right. This is particularly challenging because the choreographer also performs in the piece, and might go some way to explain why this part of the process was quite strongly led by the choreographer. On the other hand, the balance between choreographer-led and dancer-led modes of working was not markedly different between this section and other parts of the process that dealt with similarly pre-researched material. The choreographer had a clear idea of the form and function of the section already at the start of the process and was therefore perhaps less inclined to give the dancers time to work on their own on this task than on other, less researched tasks.

#### *4.2.2 The silence of the dancers*

While the description above covers only a small part of the creation of one section in one work and should not be used as a basis for generalisations, some communicational aspects stand out. Perhaps most obviously, the dancers do not have much of a verbal presence in this part of the process. As I mentioned earlier, this relative verbal silence

does not mean that the dancers are not actively communicating with the choreographer and with each other, but some dance scholars have found it problematic. Parviainen (1998:106), for example, draws attention to the “speechless” quality of interaction in ballet and modern dance and to the stereotype of the “dumb” dancer who is trained not to think or speak for herself. She claims that “consensus in the dance field is constituted by silence and lack of discussion, unquestioned values, uncritical attitudes toward one's own doing”. Rouhiainen (2003:259) confirms that “in some respects contemporary dance most often is a silent mode of interaction”. Although she does not draw a direct parallel between this silence and the power relationships in choreographic processes, she does claim that the dancer has to “surrender her or his body and skills to the goals of the choreographer” and be open to and willing to work with whatever questions the choreographer presents to her (Rouhiainen, 2003:238, 247). Rouhiainen (2003:258-259) also points out that some choreographers may find that too much talking during rehearsals distracts them from their purpose, and that dancers may find it difficult to speak up, anyway, since they are expected not to.

Expectations imply norms, so what Rouhiainen is describing may be a communicational norm in choreographic processes: the dancers are expected to be silent, silence here meaning verbal inaction. If, for now, we take this assumption at face value, it is easy to see why the dancers’ lack of speech might be a problem for a sociologically minded researcher: silence can imply powerlessness or even oppression (see e.g. Freire, 2000). Sociolinguists Bessie Dendrinos and Emilia Ribeiro Pedro (1997:216-217) define silence as “the avoidance of turn taking in conversation” – a powerless position in a society where cultural and institutional “[p]ower is routinely exercised through speech”. Compare this to Martin’s (1990:116) description of the relationship between a choreographer and dancers in the process of making new work.

The choreographer “has something she wants to say”. At the beginning of the particular process Martin describes, the choreographer is the only talking authority in the room, but as the performance approaches, the dancers gradually become more verbally active and start to discuss things for themselves. Martin seeks to empower dancers by depicting them as a collective social body, a totality that eventually takes over the choreographer’s voice. The dancers are the “raw material out of which the dance will be hewn” and “the social body that must speak the choreographer’s mind” (Martin, 1990:98) but in performance the company gains independence from the choreographer:

That the dancers can go beyond the directives of the choreographer while embodying, to some extent, her role is evidence of the assent of totality in the choreographic process and, also, the internalization of authority.

(Martin, 1990:118)

Rouhiainen (2003:260) is also occupied with the power imbalance between dancers and choreographers when she proposes that there is a need for ethical dialogue between the choreographer and the dancer: “[w]ithout fluent dialogical communication a choreographer’s openness towards her or his collaborators might be thwarted, and the other might simply become a means to the choreographer’s ends”. Rouhiainen seems suspicious of the kinds of choreographic processes that Butterworth (2009:178) describes as “didactic”, where the dancer’s role is to be an instrument at the expert choreographer’s disposal, and might be more drawn to what Butterworth terms “democratic” processes of co-ownership, marked by “collaborative methods” and “collective decision-making processes”. Butterworth points out that there are gradations between these two ends of the scale and that various approaches to making work can co-exist within a choreographic process, but the two extremes – what after Martin (1990:98) could be called a “relationship [...] of command and response” and

what Rouhiainen (2008a:51) terms “co-operative and collective participatory practices” – seem to reflect the way Martin and Rouhiainen as well as my research participants discuss their experiences of choreographic processes. Collaboration seems to be valued positively whereas “being a responder to other people’s work”, as one interviewee put it, can feel like a less satisfying experience.

Based on Example 2 above and according to Martin and Rouhiainen, it seems that there is some truth to the dancers’ relative silence in choreographic processes, but what does that silence actually entail? When speech is regarded as power and silence as the lack of power, silence is defined as an absence, as a failure to use one’s voice. If language is regarded as the primary or even sole mode of communication and silence as the opposite of language, silence becomes by definition non-communicative, but this would be a very narrow view of communication. As research into nonverbal communication, embodied interaction and linguistic as well as multimodal silence has shown, silence can and does perform a crucial role in communication (see e.g. Jaworski, 1993, 1997; Krajewski & Schröder, 2008; Streeck et al., 2011).

Rather than interpret silence automatically as something negative – a lack of power, agency, autonomy – sociolinguist Adam Jaworski (1997:8) suggests that we should view silence as “neither positive nor negative; it simply works in achieving certain communicative goals for some but not for others”. Silence can even be a tool for using power. In situations where the actors are unequal in status, “the inferior’s silence may indicate sub-ordination” but it may just as well be a sign of “defiance against the superior’s authority” (Sifianou 1997:68). The person with higher institutional status, for example a teacher in a classroom, may use silence to exert her/his authority (Jaworski, 1993:20-21). Linguist Deborah Tannen (1993:176) claims that “[s]ilence

alone [...] is not a self-evident sign of powerlessness, nor volubility a self-evident sign of domination”. The meanings of both speech and silence depend on the context and the relationship between the people interacting. Cultural and situational norms apply, and individual character traits affect communicative behaviour. The nature of the silence produced between two people is different depending on whether they know each other well, a little or not at all and whether they like each other (Sifianou, 1997:64, 69). What is important is our expectation of what kind of communicative behaviour is appropriate in any given situation:

Like talk, silence enables people to communicate both polite and impolite messages, but it is not talk or silence per se which lead to such implications. It is usually the absence of what is conventionally anticipated which loads both speech and silence with negative meaning and impolite implications.  
(Sifianou, 1997:79)

If silence is the norm, talking may be perceived as impolite. If talking is expected, staying silent may seem rude.

Context, then, is significant when interpreting silence. The sociologist Robin Wooffitt (2005:32) describes an instance of a child asking her mother a question to which the mother does not immediately respond. The child repeats shorter versions of the question until the mother responds. The mother’s initial silence goes against the expectation that spoken actions often occur in pairs: questions should be answered, greetings returned. Conversation analysts have discovered that as a norm, certain conversational openings – first parts of adjacency pairs – should be followed by an appropriate second part of a pair (see e.g. Wooffitt, 2005; Schegloff, 2007). Silence that unexpectedly follows a question can be interpreted as many things: perhaps the next speaker did not hear the question; perhaps they do not know the answer (or do not wish to say so); perhaps they disapprove of the question or the person asking it, and so



on. Whatever the interpretation, silence in this instance is not expected, which typically leads to some kind of repair sequence, such as the child repeating the question to her mother, being initiated (see e.g. Schegloff, 2007; Kääntä, 2010).

While conversation analysis often, though by no means always, focuses on verbal interaction, there are activities such as dance where silence, rather than talking, is the prevalent framework for communication and the primary way of structuring the activity (see Jaworski, 1997:383). In these situations the expectation of a verbal response to a verbal initiation may not apply. In the context of a dance rehearsal, movement and speech alternate and overlap. A dancer may ask another how she executes a particular movement; the response may be nonverbal but perfectly appropriate. The choreographer may give a spoken instruction; the dancer, in turn, may be linguistically silent but communicate a response kinetically instead. His/her verbal silence in the situation is unremarkable as such; coinciding with any action s/he takes or does not take, it may indicate that s/he has or has not understood the choreographer's meaning, or that s/he does or does not approve of the instruction – in other words it can carry various meanings.

In the case study materials, many of the choreographers' utterances were, grammatically speaking, questions. Sometimes the question part of the adjacency pair was followed by a spoken answer but often there was no verbal response. Yet there were no signs of failed expectation – no repair mechanism was activated. This is an indication of the multimodal/embodied nature of situated communication in dance rehearsals: a verbal question or prompt may take or even require the nonverbal response of the dancers trying out the task or suggestion implied by the question. Paired sequences of verbal prompts and nonverbal responses are not uncommon (see

Jaworski, 1993) in communication and seem to be a fairly stable feature of rehearsal interaction. The dancer's silence, then, is relative and actually communicative.

#### *4.2.3 Agency through interaction*

Inasmuch as the work is made “on” them and performed by them, the dancers are an indispensable part of the choreographic process. They may not always be invited to take part in the process verbally, but when they generate and perform movement according to the choreographer's instructions, they are communicating their understanding of those instructions. Depending on how much freedom the task allows and how clear it is to the dancers, they may offer the choreographer material that is more or less representative of their own tastes and desires, thus influencing the choreographer's choices. When the dancers learn material and try out the choreographer's adjustments, they are providing him/her with important information about what the movement looks like and how it does or does not work.

The dancers' (largely) nonverbal response is no less crucial than the choreographer's (largely) verbal call for the success of the interaction, although this does not mean that the verbal imbalance is always unproblematic. The process of making of the chorus line sequence described in Example 2 is in some ways reminiscent of the choreographic process depicted by Martin (1990): the choreographer is the authority who speaks, the dancers are the physical and social body that tries to perform his vision. When the choreographer speaks, the dancers usually give him their full attention, facing him, looking at him. When he asks them to do something, they respond quickly. Initially, though, the dancers only have enough information to get started. When one of them asks whether it is enough to have seven movements instead

of the requested eight, she has no way of knowing that eight is a random number that will have no significance regarding the outcome, nor that she will not be asked to teach her phrase to the others – in fact, her phrase will not be used at all. Those decisions are made by the choreographer and, in this instance, were not discussed with the dancers. The dancers actively create and shape the movement material with the choreographer, but the choreographer makes the decisions about how it will or will not be used. None of the participants in either case study questioned the choreographer's right to do so, although as mentioned before (see 4.1.4), some interviewees expressed a preference for processes that are designed to be as economical as possible, i.e. not spending time and energy on creating material that will not be used.

Inviting the dancers to engage in movement creation can be a show of trust and help build a collaborative relationship. However, as was the case in the example above, it is not always clear to the dancers what the movement material is for, which may feel like a precarious, powerless position:

*You are inviting my voice here but we don't understand this world that we are creating, so I don't know what voice, you know ... how your voice is going to [be] partaking here, and then you feel completely precarious in that sense. (FreeD2)*

Note the interviewee's use of the word 'voice' as a metaphor to describe her participation in the creative process. Similarly silence can be understood as a metaphor (see Jaworski, 1997:3-4) and for example non-motion can be regarded as silence in a context where movement normally takes place. The uncertainty described by the interviewee above might incline her towards silence in expressive terms: she might wish not to commit to any particular interpretation of the material in order to avoid overriding the choreographer's intentions. Another interviewee described overcoming this uncertainty as part of the dancer's job:

*It's his piece, and then I try to, if I don't understand, I just try to do my best to bring something that he wants as well. Of course I want to understand everything and of course I want to do the way I want to do but it's not my job. (FreeD4)*

According to this description, it is not the dancer's job to understand the choreographer's motives but to carry out his instructions. Many writers have pointed out the difference in the dancer's and the choreographer's perspectives on dance/movement: the choreographer, as the first audience of the work, has a visual view of the dance, whereas the dancer's experience is primarily – although not exclusively – physical (cf. e.g. Martin, 1990:86; Parviainen, 1998:135; Hamby, 1984). As regards communication, this means that the dancers need to interpret the choreographer's directions and negotiate the physical possibilities and limitations of his vision. The chorus line, for example, was born from the dancers' active engagement in generating movement within the given parameters, trying out the choreographer's suggestions and honing his choices, the dancers' relative quietness perhaps allowing the choreographer to maintain his train of thought. Interaction with dancers is what gives the choreographer the means to make his selections. Sometimes he may make his choice based on the dancers' ease, at other times he might prioritise the visual effect and ask the dancers to make it work in their bodies. Either way, he is dependent on the nonverbal – and of course also verbal – feedback from the dancers, i.e. their execution of his instructions.<sup>45</sup> Leadership research supports this reciprocal view of the dancer-choreographer power dynamic:

Since asymmetrical power relations are always two-way, leaders will remain dependent to some extent on the led, while followers retain a degree of autonomy and discretion. In addition, if we re-think followers as

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<sup>45</sup> The division between visual and physical experiences is of course not clear-cut: the choreographer may be physically active in the process, and the dancers can see each other. Still, the dancers cannot experience the work from the audience's perspective. This may be problematic for a choreographer who also dances in the work. This happened in the Freelance Production, where the choreographer relied on video and apprentices substituting for him to be able to observe things from the outside. He was also physically involved in much of the creation, but most decision-making seemed to require an outside view.

knowledgeable agents, we can begin to see them as proactive, self-aware and knowing subjects who have at their disposal a repertoire of possible agencies within the workplace.

(Collinson, 2005:1422)

Dancers are also aware of their agency, as this interviewee explains:

*Obviously it's [the choreographer's] piece but we also have our bricks [...] That's his city but we have our houses, because obviously each dancer brings a lot to the piece and we are creating the movement, creating the ideas based on the task [the choreographer] gave us. This is his vision, he wants to see this or this or that [...] but obviously we have a lot of influence of how it looks, what that piece consists [of].*  
(RepD6)

Dancers can and do exercise power over the choreographic process through their very skill as dancers. Foster (1997) has written about the versatility required of “the hired body”, the dancer who during her career works for a range of different choreographers with different demands on her body. Similarly, Rouhiainen’s (2003:250) interviews with contemporary dancers and choreographers revealed that the dancers are expected to place at the choreographer’s disposal “a multitalented body easily capable of adapting to various kinds of dance tasks” but that they “also need to be able to draw on their bodily experience, to be attuned to a bodily memory, to be attentive and sensitive to their work environment, as well as to interpret the shifting work-processes they are engaged in”. Dancers need to quickly tune into the nature of the process and communicate accordingly. There might be room for conversation or the choreographer might prefer to keep his cards close to his chest. The dancer might be invited to voice her thoughts and questions or to seek solutions through improvisation and practice.

The freelance dancer’s interactive role may vary considerably from job to job and indeed within any choreographic process. The ability to translate each choreographer’s desires into suitable movement, to ask for clarification when needed, and the physical communication required to make something work in a group are all part and parcel of

the dancer's professional skills and enable co-operation in the creative relationship. There are many approaches to choreographic processes, eliciting different kinds of roles and behaviour from the participants, but the dancer is hardly only a highly skilled "instrument". Rather, s/he actively engages in varying communicative strategies as befits the nature of the process. The dancers' agency, their essential role in the creation of choreography, has been established, and their silence sanctioned. The dancer not only makes movement and performs it but s/he makes the interaction within the choreographic process work (or not). It is through constant interaction that s/he becomes an agent in making the dance.

### 4.3 Visions and decisions: choreographers and leadership

#### 4.3.1 Example 3: To bow or not to bow

It is very nearly the end of the rehearsal period, only dress rehearsals remain. The company has gathered in the theatre for the choreographer's notes on the latest run, costume notes, and whatever else they have time for. When they reach the notes for the ending of the piece, a long discussion ensues. The choreographer wanted a kind of non-ending, without bows, and some of the dancers are questioning this choice or the details of how it was realised. In the excerpt below, the choreographer explains his choice and opens it for discussion, followed by comments and suggestions from some of the dancers.

**VChor** *We have the tendency to put ends and finishes [to things], which is normal and we all need that. When someone dies you need to mourn and [inaudible]. But that's exactly my question, that's exactly it. Does it end? Does it start because when the audience comes in you're already there? When has it started? [...] So I totally understand your concerns and I'm happy to discuss. I just wanted to let you know what I was coming from and that for me [it] is also an experiment.*

*So. For all of us. What I would like to try, which I'm happy to discuss and change it completely, is for now, I really would like to try, if you all agree, in the dress rehearsals, maybe I wouldn't mind to try Thursday, Friday and Saturday one or two takes, depends on how the company feels. If all of you are against that, I'm happy to, we go and make a bow [...] It's not my work and it's not my ( ), ((it's)) a proposition.*

**RepD11** *[...] Just something that there's an understanding [...] that there's a wrapping up of the situation in a way [...]*

**RepD10** *I think the exhaustion,<sup>46</sup> already when it finished, it's an end for you ((points to self)) but then like, I felt that the lights came 'boom' ((both hands, flat palms towards each other, sharp movement forward))*

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<sup>46</sup> 'Exhaustion' is the name used by the choreographer and the company of a section right before the end of the piece.

*like that didn't give you the time to actually finish what you were  
((finger points behind her head))  
doing, which is nothing about finding an end but being able to actually do  
the movement [...] like  
((marks the arm movements near the end of the section and the  
reverberation after the finish))*

**RepD9** *But this is then this effect of being thrown back into the normal reality.  
Maybe you are in this thing 'ah and now'  
((hunched shoulders, hands in fist, bent elbows, rhythmically going up and  
down, marking the phrase))  
'now the next movement will come to an end' but then it does this  
((slides palms quickly against each other, making a clap sound))  
this and 'ah'  
((looks right))  
'eh'  
((looks left))*

**RepD10** *But then I would maybe cut the light on even before, when we're still in the  
movement  
((marks some of it))  
and  
((stops moving))  
that makes it stop, like 'whoa' [...]*

**RepD2** *I felt yesterday as well like, we always go ((on)) about experience, living at  
the moment, and at that moment I couldn't do that because for me that was  
the end of the piece. And there was this awkward moment, but then during  
that time you start reflecting on what you've just been through, and I was in  
a really bad place because I was frustrated with some stuff that happened  
and I waited until that moment to start reflecting. [...]*

*Then even if we start undoing the knots,<sup>47</sup> [...] I was not doing the  
experience, I was doing two things at the same time. And then – as well like,  
what, everything we build up, the entire half an hour kind of just gets lost  
and, and what's the point [...]*

Discussion about how the dancers experienced the ending, as well as how an audience might experience it, continues. As is often the case, a few people do most of the talking, some interject occasionally while others remain quiet throughout. Finally, pressed for time, the choreographer proposes a different ending to try:

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<sup>47</sup> To take down the stage set.



**VChor** *Okay let's do something for now because we need to go as well. So for the dress rehearsal. What about if you finish, you breathe, you come in a line ((arms stretched out in front, bent at the wrist, fingers pointing towards the middle, moves hands towards himself)) closer to the audience, to the ((turns palms out, fingers up, stretched elbows)) structure, maybe both sides or maybe on one, acknowledge ((bows head slightly)) ((nodding, palms facing up in lap)) thank you, and go back and bring ((pulls closed fists from out in front of his face towards his lap)) [unclear] bring the structure down?*

**RepD2** *Ah so we don't (.) like we acknowledge the audience first before we bring...*

**RepD8** *This is the opposite ((of what we were doing before))*

**VChor** *Yeah I don't think we should go to a middle ground because that's gonna be more confusing.*

The proposition is discussed further. The artistic director of the company speaks up in favour of not letting go of the choreographer's original idea and the dancers are slightly backpedalling, but the choreographer decides to incorporate a bow in the first dress rehearsal, and a modified version afterwards.

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The example above illustrates various aspects of the choreographer's job. He first frames the problem, then opens it up for discussion, considers the feedback and proposes a solution and, eventually, announces his decision. This is not a final decision that could not be changed at a later stage in the process, but it nevertheless solves the issue for the time being, and lets the dancers know what to do with the problem when they next encounter it in the first dress rehearsal. Dancers certainly participate in the decision-making process, some more than others, but even though the choreographer says "it's not my work", meaning he is not the one on stage and is willing to let the

decision be made or at least influenced by the dancers, only he can announce the decision. The choreographer leads, the dancers follow.

This chapter looks at the institutional foundation and social construction of the choreographer's leadership. I will suggest that understanding the choreographer's job as one of transformational leadership will help to explain his leadership success (or otherwise); I will also discuss how that success might be measured from a follower-centric point of view. Two prominent aspects of the choreographer's leadership stand out from the interviews: his role as the visionary instigator of the work and the primary decision-maker in the process. I will argue that these roles may result in conflicting demands placed on the choreographer, who is, on the one hand, required to make or at least confirm the vast majority of the decisions that constitute the choreographic process, and on the other hand expected to be a visionary leader who makes use of the expertise and artistry of the dancers. The next section of this chapter introduces the concept of leadership and touches on issues of power. I will then turn to decision-making as a management activity, followed by a dancer's point of view on choreographers as leaders. Finally, I will briefly summarise the challenges and discuss the aesthetics of leadership.

#### *4.3.2 Choreographer by the grace of dancers*

The concept of leadership can relate to a person who is considered to have the characteristics of a leader (traits approach) or to anyone in a position of authority; leadership can also be understood as a process (or style, or practice) that leaders and followers engage in, or as power to get results (power to make other people do things

they would not otherwise accomplish) (Grint, 2010:3-14).<sup>48</sup> Choreographers are thus not the only people who can exhibit leadership behaviour in a choreographic process, but they are arguably in a default leadership position.

Leadership research has shifted from identifying traits that make an individual a good leader towards understanding leadership as the management of meaning, and follower-centric approaches that consider how leadership is constructed in interaction between leaders and followers (Hansen et al., 2007:548). I take a social constructionist view that considers followers to be essential to the construction of leadership. This chapter is therefore as much about dancers as it is about choreographers, and I want to emphasise the connection. Dancers can work without institutional leadership and a choreographer can make work without dancers, whether creating a solo for her- or himself or a concept/script/movement for others to perform, but a choreographer can only be the leader of a choreographic process if the dancers agree to follow him/her. Having followers is an essential condition of being a leader (Grint, 2010:126, 13).

Nevertheless, the dancer's agency is always set against the backdrop of the choreographer's power and influence. Only very small and temporary networks seem to cope without any kind of institutional leadership. Hansen et al. (2007) argue that followers' decision to accept leaders' influence is partly based on aesthetic judgements – gut feelings, emotions, bodily presence, charisma, etc. This may be even more prominently true in a work environment that deals almost exclusively in aesthetic

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<sup>48</sup> Organisational theorists sometimes make a difference between leaders and managers. For example, leaders can be defined as visionary risk-takers and drivers of organisational change and managers as problem-solvers committed to the organisation's current goals and vision (Champoux, 2010:287-288). These distinctions have been contested (see e.g. Birkinshaw, 2012) and are not particularly relevant to my analysis. My focus is on leadership, but with an understanding that choreographers also engage activities that are better described as management.

judgements and sensations. A choreographer's skill as a dancer may be part of her/his charisma:

*I like his movement quality when he is dancing, so when he is showing how to do things, movements, I share the same opinion that that's the way it should be. (RepD8)*

Clearly, there is a crucial power disparity between dancers and choreographers in projects that are initiated and led by the choreographer. Kwon, Clarke and Wodak (2009:293) suggest conceptualising power as "a duality of structure and process, with individuals being structurally 'empowered' or 'constrained' by their unique configuration of 'knowledges' that play out through processes of discursive interaction". In some sense, the dancers are necessarily "constrained" in their power to make decisions because they can only have as much knowledge about the choreographer's vision – the goal of the process – as the choreographer shares with them. It is up to the choreographer to decide how much s/he is willing to discuss the problems and decisions and be swayed by opinions offered; without this information, the dancers have no problems to solve or decisions to make. The choreographer may also feel an ethical responsibility to not invite the dancers to share too much of themselves in the process:

**PChor** *I'm just thinking in terms of how in this process you're bringing yourselves to it. I guess I just wanna be clear that I'm not asking you to write down your own experience of grief. I feel like it's not fair to expect people to bring their own histories in that way unless there's something you want to share. But I don't want to put you in a position where that's something you feel like you need to do to make this work. Like, I wanna be responsible that this is my experience, I suppose.*

**FreeD2** *Unless that we are all (connecting)*

**PChor** *Yeah. But that's your choice how much you [connect], you know, cause I think you can also engage with something emotionally, or physically, even if it's not your experience, like, through direction [...] I don't wanna use your*

*stories, if that makes sense, cause I don't know what you've all been through.*

This is a two-pronged issue. On the one hand, the choreographer is demonstrating accountability and concern for the dancers' wellbeing, acknowledging his authority and promising not to abuse it. On the other hand, he could be understood to discourage emotional involvement in the themes of the piece, leaving the dancers uncertain of his support if emotions should surface.

Although I have emphasised the authority of the choreographer, members of the company can also assume leadership roles and influence decision-making. One way of understanding the power differences between dancers is to look at the kinds of contributions they are able to make, either because of institutional hierarchy (rehearsal directors; mentors and their apprentices) or individual expertise. If we accept that "the ability to manage uncertainty on behalf of others provides a vital power base" (Miller et al., 1996:296), it becomes easier to see why a dancer who is able to support her/his colleagues on stage might also have more influence in group discussions or in conversation with the choreographer. A dancer with considerable experience as a maker may hold more sway than someone without choreographing expertise. A dancer with specialist skills needed in the piece may become very influential to some part of the process, as was the case in the Repertory Production: the dancers needed to learn how to tie together the stage set as part of the piece, which meant that a dancer with experience of knots emerged as someone with the power to influence and solve construction issues. This was not a position that he sought or that remained unchallenged, but his influence was nevertheless visible in how the piece appeared on stage.

#### 4.3.3 All decisions great and small

Managers typically spend much of their time making decisions (Miller et al., 1996:293) and decision-making is considered to be “[o]ne of the key tasks faced by any leader” (Pennington, 2002:143). Likewise in a choreographic process someone has to make decisions, and that is usually the choreographer’s role, although that does not mean that the dancers cannot contest those decisions. As one choreographer put it:

*Someone needs to make a decision and my experience tell[s] me that people inside [the process] can agree or not but normally are happy for someone else to make the decisions. If they are not happy, they can raise their voice so the decision can be modified. It’s not massively important [that I have the final decision] but someone has to make the decisions and that’s kind of my role. (VChor)*

Organisational power relations are evident in decision-making. Who can make decisions, especially big ones? Who is excluded from or stays outside the decision-making process? Who has influence over what needs to be decided? These questions are crucial to understanding organisational politics (Miller et al., 1996:293-294). The example at the beginning of this chapter is typical of the choreographic processes observed: while any of the dancers can bring up topics for conversation (e.g. should the light come on quicker at the end) and the ones who are able to express and justify their opinions can certainly influence decisions,<sup>49</sup> the only person with power to actually make decisions is the choreographer. As soon as the work roles of choreographer and dancer are named, they evoke a system of leaders and followers, institutional power relationships and specialised tasks, including choreographers as decision-makers.

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<sup>49</sup> As in any group situation, both formal and informal group hierarchies as well as differences in personalities, confidence in language skills etc. influence who takes part in group discussions, the length and frequency of their contributions and how influential those contributions are. The opportunity to participate was still, at least in theory, open to all dancers.

While it may seem that a choreographer makes decisions alone, a choreographic process is to a significant degree a group decision making process: the decisions affect the group and the group has influence on the decisions even if the choreographer, by virtue of his/her leadership role within the group, has the final say on them. At the very least, the choreographer as the person with the ultimate vote, the final say, needs to communicate her/his decisions about the dancers' future actions to them. At the other extreme, in a collective process where all participants are also choreographers, all decisions or the right to make decisions have to be negotiated. Most processes, the case studies included, probably fall somewhere in between absolute dictatorship and full-blown democracy.

Jonathan Clifton (2009) writes in the *Journal of Business Communication* about how subordinates and managers alike “do influence” in organisational decision making. He draws attention to how “discursive resources [...] are differentially available to the participants according to the identities that are made relevant during the interaction” (2009:60). In Example 3 the only identities that are obvious based on the transcription are the institutional ones of dancer and choreographer – follower and leader. Clifton draws attention to the difference between making a decision and announcing it and claims that while all members of a group/team/organisation can participate in “the sense making that permeates the talk around a decision”, only the chairperson/team leader/manager has the category-bound right to announce the decision and thus confirm that this was a decision making event (2009:61).

From my material it is clear that in the context of a choreographic process the right to announce decisions – to have the last word – is mostly bound to the situated identity of the choreographer and, at times, to the rehearsal director. In situations within the

process that do not involve either the choreographer or the rehearsal director the right to announce decisions is negotiated in the process of making the decision and is likely to be based on existing or emerging social hierarchies. These decisions may be more available to be contested by the other members of the group than those announced by the choreographer or the rehearsal director; it is also not uncommon for dancers to defer decision making until they can have the decision confirmed (and thus announced) by the choreographer or the rehearsal director.

Although the power to announce decisions is available only to certain members of the organisation based on their work roles, Clifton (2009) maintains that influence over decision making is available to all members of a team: the less powerful can wield their influence by skilfully using the turns available to them to seek agreement with the decision announcer. Influence, then, stems from communicative competence, with personality traits and group dynamics also playing a part, and is not equally available to all group members even if there is ostensibly no hierarchy between them.

In both case studies, the choreographer and the dancers sat down to talk about things fairly often in the manner of Example 3. These briefings or discussions with the whole group were initiated by the choreographer and consisted of some combination of giving out tasks, explaining the choreographer's thinking and vision, mapping out and solving problems and gathering feedback and input from the dancers. They were opportunities for dancers to influence the process, although not everyone felt the need to participate actively in decision making and some who tried were overruled by either other dancers or the choreographer.

Decision-making is both "a functional prerequisite of effective organization" and "a maelstrom of political activity and sectional conflict", meaning that it can and needs



to be studied from different angles (Miller et al., 1996:294). For my purposes accounts that focus on rationality in managerial decision-making (see Miller et al., 1996:294-295) are not particularly useful: the most important decisions in choreographic processes are typically not about maximising profits at minimum cost, at least unless we redefine profit and cost in artistic terms. The political aspect is more interesting. In a repertory company, for example, the choreographer has legitimate institutional authority over the choreographic process but not the dancers as employees of the company. Staff responsible for scheduling has direct influence over the process and some power over the choreographer. An artistic director has significant power to limit the choreographer's capacity to make decisions. The dancers have no direct contract with the choreographer. If the choreographer is also in a producing/managing role, however, her/his institutional power is much greater and the dancers are much more dependent on her/his decisions. In either case, personal relationships between the participants and the choreographic methods used have much to do with what kind of influence the dancers have over the choreographer's artistic or practical decisions.

It is important to acknowledge these asymmetrical power relations and understand that while power can be resisted, those with less power may have limited options for expressing opposition if they want to avoid sanctions (Collinson, 2005:1435). Furthermore, the decision-making processes that dancers have access to may be limited to topics that are deemed "safe" while potentially controversial issues that threaten the status quo are kept off the agenda and thus remain "nondecisions" (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962). Commitment to the project could be seen as one such issue: although rehearsals that ran overtime sometimes caused issues in the dancers' personal lives, I never witnessed this topic being raised with the choreographer. This could be one sign of a kind of culture of commitment where complaints or suggestions

that could in some way be interpreted as lack of commitment are suppressed. An episode that makes this power dynamic more visible took place on the first day of rehearsals for the Repertory Production when the choreographer introduced the idea of sociocracy as part of his methodology for the process: decisions would be discussed until everyone agrees, or at least no one disagrees.

*As much as we can I would like to lead this process in a sociocratic way which is the next step [from democracy]. It's like everyone agrees, or at least no one disagrees. It means [that] we had that discussion. [...] Someone has to be proposing things and at this stage it's gonna be me, but I would like you to agree. And if we need to open a discussion, I'm happy to open that discussion [...] **I'm not talking about the end product for example, I'm talking about more the day by day what we do here.** (VChor, emphasis added)*

While the choreographer admitted later to me in our interview and to everyone else in a group discussion that he never expected the process to actually be sociocratic, (“in a personal way, I don’t believe in sociocracy”) the idea served as a tool for working on the theme of the piece and a framework for discussions. From the very beginning, however, it was clear that the power to make decisions remained with the choreographer. The group was offered a chance to influence the process but the choreographer retained control over the outcome and therefore also the process.

Choreographers differ from one and other in their leadership and decision-making styles. Very few decisions were made by either company as a group, regardless of the experiment in sociocracy in the Repertory Production. The discussion about the ending of the piece in Example 3 illustrates a consultative style of leadership decision-making, where the leader makes the decision but consults with the group members. Different decision-making styles coexist in the choreographic process. Some decisions are made unilaterally by the choreographer (e.g. the choreographer decides the cue for the dancer in Example 1) or jointly by the choreographer and members of the production team,

and the dancers are merely informed of the result, if that.<sup>50</sup> These decisions range from daily scheduling to set design to casting and so on. Other decisions are made by the choreographer after consulting with the dancers – a typical example could be asking what is possible for the dancer in a given situation before changing her movement, timing or spacing. Overall, however, the choreographer is the primary decision-maker in a choreographic process. Consensual decision-making comes at a cost that most organisations find too high: “time, training, a willingness to resolve conflict, and letting go of personal agendas for the good of the group as a whole and the decision reached” (Pennington, 2002:173). Lack of time, in particular, was a problem in the case studies (see 4.1.4) and affected decision-making and leadership behaviour in both processes, focusing power more in the hands of the choreographer when time was short.

Different stages of the choreographic process may require different styles of leadership and decision-making. One of the dancers observed that the choreographer became less interested in or receptive to the dancers’ opinions towards the end of the process. In terms of leadership, one could perhaps say that the “problem” of the new piece was close to a “good enough” solution, and although the problem-solving had been a shared process, the choreographer needed to decide when to stop working on the problem and declare a resolution. One of the choreographers also acknowledged that there was a point during the process when the dancers needed “a common enemy” and that it was his job to provide them with that push and demand more of them. In fact, he

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<sup>50</sup> When a choreographer shared with the dancers some news from a production meeting (colour of the floor, ideas for costumes), some of the dancers later commented that this was not a particularly common occurrence.

foreshadowed this development already on the first day of rehearsals, in his talk to the dancers:

*What I'm trying to do here as well is to start the piece on us. It's not only about that, it's about creating that team, agreeing and deciding that what we are, we are in this shit together for the next four weeks, so even if you start hating me in a couple of days, which I don't think is still yet but if it happen, you have to go with it. Fake it.*  
(VChor)

Grint (2005) argues that successful leadership is less about responding appropriately to external conditions and more about legitimising decisions already made by framing the problem in a persuasive manner. He identifies three types of authority, suited to different kinds of problems: critical problems require a commander to provide answers; a manager can choose the appropriate process for solving a tame problem; wicked problems are the territory of a leader who asks questions and engages followers in collaborative decision-making.<sup>51</sup> Choreographers are faced with problems of all kinds, which they contextualise and respond to in all of these ways. The choreographer is in charge of planning how time is spent during the rehearsal period in general and at any moment in the studio, and time pressure can lead to situations in which delays are perceived as critical problems over which the choreographer must exert his authority. In the example below, the rehearsal has been interrupted because of a problem with the stage set, for the building of which the dancers are responsible:

**VChor** *So tell me when you're ready to carry on please*  
*((pauses))*

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<sup>51</sup> In their article on social policy planning, Rittel and Webber (1973) describe as “wicked” problems that are unique and have no fixed definition, cause, or right or wrong solution. There is no optimal solution, so the problem-solver has to settle for a “good enough” one, with consequences that are not immediately obvious or observable. Tame problems, in contrast, are more like mathematical equations: they have a clear goal and a right solution that, when reached, is immediately recognisable as correct.

**VChor** *I need you to be a bit more efficient. Do we need to completely undo it or not? ((points towards knot))*

**RepD9** *No, I fixed this now but I would correct ((reaches towards another knot)) this*

**VChor** *So can you please correct it a bit faster please. Does it need more hands, more [...]*

Others start to talk and RepD9 and RepD7 stand up to look at the knot. The choreographer's demeanour is serious and his voice quiet. He is unable to provide the dancers with a simple answer of what to do with the knot and is therefore engaging them in the process of finding a solution. The episode could thus be interpreted as one of consultation. But compared to the collaborative search for a good solution in the example of the bows at the beginning of the chapter, the atmosphere is tense and the choreographer's message is clear: we are running out of time, this is your problem, you need to solve it as quickly as possible.

Sociologists Irving Tallman and Louis N. Gray found in their review on decision-making research that "time pressures force actors to simplify their decision tasks and to make more cautious decisions" and incline them "to overweight negative information"; they may then "become transfixed", failing to use the time available to consider potential alternatives (1990:419). Certainly a tendency to return to or become stuck with the same problems time and again could be observed in the case studies.

*Where we are at the moment it's kind of problem-solving and the only way we move forward is by solving the problem. If the problem can never be solved or we keep changing the parameters of the problem, then we can never move on. (RepD8)*

Solving the problem of creating a piece requires a sequence of decisions, and time pressure pushes the participants to make those decisions perhaps before they feel ready

to do so, but as one choreographer put it, not all of the decisions in the chain have to be final and ready. A decision is simply a starting point for the next one and has to be made so that the process can move forward.

*To make a decision means that we will work towards that direction and we will make it happen. Sometimes the decision is not the end, it's the beginning. I mean a red rope or white rope – the decision of mak[ing] that choice is not the end for the piece but it's the beginning to carry on working. (VChor)*

Once the colour of the props has been decided, they can be ordered. Only then can they be tested, problems uncovered and further decisions made.

#### 4.3.4 What followers want

An extensive review of literature on trust in leadership, carried out by C. Shawn Burke, Dana E. Sims, Elizabeth H. Lazzara and Eduardo Salas (2007), presents a framework for understanding how followers' trust towards leaders is established and moderated, as well as the potential outcomes of trust in leadership. The concept of trust in the workplace will be discussed in more depth in 4.5; for now it is important to note that leadership effectiveness is associated with trust.<sup>52</sup> The outcomes of trust, presented as exclusively positive by Burke et al. (2007:607), include increased upward communication, so called "organizational citizenship behaviour" (willingness to perform tasks that are not part of the job description such as staying late to finish a task), and willingness to learn through feedback. Trust in leadership facilitates followers' performance quality and quantity, decreases turnover, and induces in the followers a *willingness* to be followers. A trusted leader, then, has the potential needed

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<sup>52</sup> According to a functional approach to leadership, "the leader is effective to the degree that he/she ensures that all functions critical to the task and team maintenance are completed" (Burke et al., 2007:611).

to be an effective one, and the choreographers seemed to be aware of this. One choreographer explicitly asked the dancers to trust him at the beginning of the process:

*Like in many process we will do a lot of different tasks that some of them you could relate [to the theme or method of the piece], some of them not. I just need you to trust that everything I will ask you to do is related somehow to one or the other, and at some point it will make sense or not, but somehow it's related, and if you need to know why, ask me. (VChor)*

Burke et al. describe followers who trust their leaders variably as committed, motivated, innovative, willing to take feedback, having a good attitude, putting in effort, enjoying high job satisfaction and willing to “go above and beyond” (2007:624). This could equally be a description of how dancers are expected to approach their job. What, then, can a leader do to gain followers’ trust and reap the benefits? Burke et al. (2007) list various trustee characteristics, grouped into the categories of ability, benevolence and integrity, that engender trust. A leader is perceived as able and therefore trustworthy if she/he is able to provide “clear, compelling direction” (cf. importance of clarity in communication, 4.1.4), to structure work functionally and to ensure the best possible team composition. Benevolence refers to the leader’s interest in coaching group members to fulfil their potential, demonstrating a caring, supportive, respectful and fair attitude towards followers, and consulting them on important decisions. Finally, leaders who are consistently accountable for their actions, just and fair in their interactions and who hold values similar to those of their followers are seen as trustworthy because of their integrity.

From an ethical point of view, choreographers as leaders encounter similar challenges of encouraging trust-building and knowledge sharing to those faced by managers elsewhere. How to create a work environment that contributes to job satisfaction? How to enable tacit knowledge sharing? At the very least some willingness to cooperate

must be maintained for the process to reach its (shared) goals. I will focus on two aspects of trust-creating leadership that emerged as important to dancers: the choreographer's strong vision and ability to communicate it clearly, related to transformational leadership, and her/his respectful treatment of the dancers, manifested as consultative leadership.

#### 4.3.4.1 Compelling vision clearly communicated

*I think, the choreographer, it's their job to define the vision, and it's the dancer's role to fulfil the vision. Somewhere along the way those two things meet and the vision gets altered by what's happening in the room, but we're always working somehow towards a vision that is dictated from this person's idea. (RDir)*

Transformational leadership is associated with inspiration, motivation, empowerment, creativity and innovation – “performance beyond expectations” (Hansen et al., 2007:549). An important aspect of motivating followers is relating visions to followers through stories that give them a felt sense of meaning and purpose, which is something that I observed choreographers doing to varying degrees particularly at the beginning of the process. This is an example of leadership as “management of meaning” (Fairhurst & Connaught, 2014:22). Here, a choreographer is delivering his vision to the dancers on the first day of rehearsals:

*We were talking about internal logic or meaning, we were talking about human movement, and we were talking about experience, first person experience. So what I'm gonna try do with [the piece] is to gather the three of them, in which one we are gonna tell a story. It's gonna be a metaphor of a very specific thing that I'm gonna tell you about that, right now.*

*We're gonna find a virtuosity of using human body, so we're gonna find impressive ways of watching you. It was amazing to see you try to achieve that intense movement for one minute, and not only see you in the centre but watching everyone around be so involved with you. So this what we're gonna try to achieve, with a human go to those limits, so get ready to get exhausted and get tired. [laughter from dancers] (VChor)*



Note the inclusive use of ‘we’ (“we’re gonna tell/find/try”) but also the responsible ‘I’ (“I’m gonna try/tell”), as well as the praise (“it was amazing to see you”) and the promise of a challenge that will develop the dancers (“we’re gonna find a virtuosity of using human body”, “impressive ways of watching you”). With a final touch of humour, the choreographer seems to win the dancers over.

Of all the trust-creating leader characteristics the ability to set a compelling direction – a strong vision and clear instructions – came up most often in the interviews.

*I mean I can always add something in my mind, “oh that would be great if he did this or maybe it’s not great but we do this” but I trust him because this is his idea and his vision of the piece. (RepD6)*

*I think as long as there’s a clear vision from the choreographer and in the process it’s being clearly led or guided, that’s what I really enjoy. Working with somebody rather than being left to generate something. So yeah, I enjoy structure and I enjoy somebody who knows what they want or at least that are pointing towards a direction and we can help kind of burrow towards it. (RepD11)*

“Visions are effective if they are communicated with enthusiasm and confidence and are perceived to be feasible” (Hansen et al., 2007:549), which might be why choreographers were likely to voice their enthusiasm with a “loving your work, team” or “this piece is going to be great”. Of course the impact of the choreographer’s encouragement depends on how authentic it seems to the dancers.

The choreographer was repeatedly described as the one with the vision and the one who has the final say:

*At the end of the day their vision, at that moment during their creation, is law. (RepD2)*

Yet an inspiring vision only carries the process so far. The dancers also need enough detailed information about what they are expected to accomplish:

*Maybe it's about just being clear about what is expected [...] you can set yourself up as a director, making all the decisions and then not communicate very clearly what those decisions are and therefore make it unclear for people [...] (FreeD1)*

Availability of information can become a crucial factor in job satisfaction. Management researcher Charles O'Reilly III (1980) has demonstrated that within organisations, individuals' perceived information overload or underload has an effect on both their performance and job satisfaction. Interestingly, although information overload has been shown to decrease individuals' decision-making performance it also seems to increase their satisfaction: extra information, while problematic to process and not directly useful to the task, may help to increase individuals' confidence in the decisions they are making. Similarly, information underload decreases job satisfaction. Granted, the dancer's daily tasks differ significantly from those of office workers, but perhaps some parallels may be drawn. "Clarity" or "clear tasks" were mentioned several times as something the dancers look for in the choreographer's communication. Clarity did not seem to be related to any particular type of task, physical or mental, or to be a function of knowing exactly what the material was for. Rather, "clear tasks" seem to be fairly self-contained and not layered with too much meaning to begin with. The task should contain just enough information to enable fluent decision-making – no under- or overload – and yet there was often an interest in knowing and talking more, in sharing the ideas and motivations behind the work. Further information may not have been necessary for the dancers to carry out the choreographers' tasks to his satisfaction, but it was something the dancers sought in moments of uncertainty.

#### 4.3.4.2 Dancers should be seen *and* heard

Discrepancies between how the choreographic process is contextualised and how the choreographer leads it can cause issues. The problem is summed up here by a choreographer addressing the dancers early on in the process:

*That's just a weird thing of like having things in my head and things on the page and translating that to you but then also how to (.) do much more than that kind of take you on a (.) for us all to go on a journey, so that I'm discovering something about what this is with you rather than just making bits come (.) on stage (PChor)*

On the one hand, this choreographer is faced with a management problem: he has some fairly specific ideas that he would like to realise, and so he sets in motion certain processes, in the form of creative tasks, that have produced interesting images before. On the other hand, he is aware of a creative process requiring inspiring leadership and frames it as a joint journey of discovery. This leads to some confusion later on when dancers who are used to collaborative processes are working with movement but cannot necessarily see how their tasks relate to the theme of the work:

**FreeD2** *What is the frame in each section? The image or the word or*

**FreeD3** *And I think that's very important [...] I kind of think it will come as well but it's good to, I guess, address that. We will need it as well, to be able to... and also like the duets we've been now setting, that they are just not about the movement, because you probably don't want it to be just about the movement.*

*[...]*

**PChor** *It's certainly a process of me learning what, what tools to give you guys. And partly because I'm not in there doing it, I'm still here, they would be questions that I would have as well like, how am I doing this, but because I'm not there, I'm kind of forgetting that. [...] Because my toolkit might be really small ((laughs)), because this is not necessarily how I've worked.*

The choreographer identifies his dual role as choreographer and dancer in the work as a potential source of miscommunication. By encouraging input from dancers he is not only attempting to make them feel valued and consulted but also hoping to gain insights into the process of performing the work (see Burke et al., 2007:623). He also recognises that the way he has framed the current process is different to his past experiences of processes as a dancer. A consultative leadership style can help him build trust as long as his interest in dancers' opinions is perceived as authentic.

Although they expected the choreographer to have a strong vision for the work, the dancers expressed their appreciation of a consultative leadership style:

*Yes he is here as a choreographer but he's not here as the almighty guru, "I know all" [but rather] "I've got this vision and we're here to figure this vision out, to figure this image out, to come and work together and just have fun as well". (RepD2)*

Fair and respectful treatment of dancers was also mentioned several times:

**TT** *What makes him nice to work for?*

**RepD3** *He's got no ego. He's totally open. He has so much respect for everyone individually, he places everyone on one level. I mean he's the choreographer but I feel like I could say anything to him and he wouldn't take it personally, or he would take it as a good thing, any kind of feedback, while there's some people that, you know, maybe they say they would like feedback but really you couldn't tell them a hundred percent of what you thought of something.*

Being open to feedback was considered a desirable leader characteristic. The kind of psychological safety where "well intentioned actions will not lead to punishment" (Burke et al., 2007:622), described by the dancer above, can strengthen trust. The choreographer is expected to and is aware of needing to listen to the dancers and, importantly, to hear and respond to what they have to say. Otherwise a dancer may feel that her contribution is not really welcome:

*When you're directing I think one has to have a huge capacity to listen [...] Sometimes it's like you are asked a question and you answer but you feel that you haven't been listened to, really – that that was just to ... to do the right thing. (FreeD2)*

The importance of listening came up in several interviews, although one interviewee pointed out that it is possible for a choreographer to invite opinions from the dancers for the wrong reasons:

**FreeD1** *My tendency as a maker is to keep [...] – probably in the wrong way sometimes – keep trying to throw things open so that people can say what they think about what's happening all the time.*

**TT** *What do you mean wrong way?*

**FreeD1** *Well I sometimes think it's in the wrong way because sometimes I think it's my own insecurity or lack of clarity about what's happening that's asking for that feedback.*

Talking does not automatically equal understanding. The interviewees reported instances where they had tried to raise questions or issues within a choreographic process but were either misunderstood or otherwise ignored. Some mentioned the pressure the choreographer works under as a potential hindrance to communication.

*I imagine that I've also been in situations where I as the director or choreographer have not really acknowledged [that there's little information for the performers] because you're in such a brain, a funny place, when you're making so much [...] out of the thing and you can really lose yourself in that. (FreeD1)*

If the choreographer is unable or unwilling to share what s/he does or does not know about the piece s/he is making, the dancers may end up in the difficult position of not knowing what is expected of them, which in turn may eat away at trust in the relationship. Furthermore, successful communication is not beneficial only to the dancer's understanding but may also be an invaluable support to the choreographer: the dancers' questions and suggestions can help the choreographer clarify his/her

thoughts, and their enthusiasm and openness can support her/him in moments of doubt (see John-Steiner, 2000). I believe that this confidence-boosting communication is not just verbal but may have to do with being physically willing and able to try out new things. Certainly fluent and adequate communication is a helpful, even crucial, professional skill for both dancers and choreographers.

There is a fine balance between opening the process up for conversation and making sure it keeps moving on; both were mentioned as desirable skills for a choreographer. An atmosphere of being seen and heard, feeling like a useful contributor to the process, is important to the dancers but it is also important to receive enough information about what one is expected to accomplish:

*Maybe it's about just being clear about what is expected [...] you can set yourself up as a director, making all the decisions and then not communicate very clearly what those decisions are and therefore make it unclear for people [...] (FreeD1)*

#### 4.3.5 Leadership: a balancing act

The ideal of efficiency seems to have considerable impact on the dance world, as we saw with the discussion on time pressure (see 4.1.4). As we discuss *how* choreographers do or should behave as leaders (and dancers as followers), perhaps we should also stop to ask *why*. What are the ideals being sought and realised? Organisational aesthetics is a field of research that tries to recognise aesthetics at work in the life of organisations (Taylor, 2013). Hansen et al. (2007:546) emphasise that aesthetics, in this context at least, is less about art or beauty and more accurately described as a kind of corporeal approach to knowledge with “felt meanings and sensory experiences” at its core. For leadership studies, this embodied approach means finding criteria other than effectiveness or efficiency to evaluate leaders’ success, and

acknowledging “the aesthetic aspects of social influence processes in leadership” (Hansen et al., 2007:554).

Hansen et al. (2007:547) note that an aesthetic of efficiency has been governing organisational thinking and “modernist management ideals” and suggest that a consciously aesthetic approach to organisations and leadership can provide other ways to evaluate organisational success. “The emergence of the aesthetic management paradigm places the aesthetic manager as an artisan in an aesthetic firm, seeking excellence in craft instead of an exclusive pursuit of profit,” they claim (Hansen et al., 2007:547). But if aesthetic leadership is not aspiring to effectiveness, what are its goals? Followers’ increased motivation and creativity, and experiences of meaningfulness and purpose, are some suggested outcomes. These denote presumably happier workers, but there is also an implication that a happy worker is a productive one. A leader gets results from followers; an “aesthetic” leader gets results from willing followers?

Efficiently or not, the choreographer has to balance production decisions and relations (sound, light, set and costume artists, marketing, financial and contractual obligations, etc.) and creative planning with studio work and have energy left to be genuinely present with the dancers. The producer-choreographer found the combination taxing:

*[In future projects] I will narrow down my role to just being more present in the studio and not trying to do everything, so that I can be more present with the dancers and be able to listen and respond to what we’re all going through [...] (PChor)*

There is a need to provide dancers with a compelling vision for the work and clear direction towards goals but also encourage trust through a more consultative leadership style. This is a balancing act captured in Example 3 at the beginning of this chapter. The dancers had some misgivings about the decision the choreographer had made

about the ending of the piece. Given the chance, they expressed their opinions and suggested changes, but afterwards there seemed to be a sense of disappointment about the choreographer's decision to take those comments to heart and try a very different solution. The dancers wanted to be heard but ultimately the choreographer staying true to his vision was more important to them.<sup>53</sup>

In this instance, winning a choreographer over turned out not to be a desirable outcome for all the dancers. One of the qualities that the interviewed dancers mentioned as desirable in a choreographer was "knowing what he wants", and it may be a matter of professional pride for the dancer to be able to deliver that vision. Finding the right balance between making decisions independently and letting others influence him was also something that the choreographer was thinking about in our interview afterwards:

**TT** *You did open it up for discussion – how did that discussion influence you?*

**VChor** *It did because I feel that although I am the choreographer, or because I am the choreographer, that's my role and my area of expertise as far as I can make decisions. It means, if [the composer] has a really strong gut feeling about something, it's only so far that I'm gonna say no. If I have a very strong gut feeling that that's not right, the conversation carries on until one of us is convinced by the other. [...]*

*With the lighting it's the same and with the performance, at the end of the day for me it's a little bit the same, so the composition is decided by me but if someone is uncomfortable or has a very strong feeling that that's not right there is a moment that my area of decision [making] has to end to give room to that person who at the end of the day is the one that is performing. [...]*

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<sup>53</sup> I am, of course, generalising greatly, since not all dancers took part in the conversation and I only discussed it with some, informally, at a later date.



*So it does influence me, and that's something I need to make a decision [about] at some point in my future, if I want to be a tyrant that makes all the decisions, hear people but the final word is mine, which so far it's not, or I carry on in that way in which I have an idea and then it's modified by what other people involved in the process think. So, so far, yes, it did modify my initial idea. And I don't feel it as a compromise, from my side, I feel it as the people that had to make a decision made the decision. (VChor)*

To be a tyrant or a collaborator, that is the question.

## 4.4 On working together

### 4.4.1 Example 4: Unanimously in unison

The choreographer gives a lecture (with a flip board) on transformation vs. transportation to the dancers (not the whole group) and moves on to give them a creation task:

**VChor** *So I would like you to convey, more than portray, a transformation, and that transformation on a stage for you is gonna to be for something very regimental that (currently) is the fencing, the attack and defence, to something much more individual and free. So together, the methodology I would like you to use is that all of you agree a very martial, very regimental, very solid way of moving that is a unison as a starting point [...] so it's another continuation of the fencing, of the attack and defence, more in a physical way, without the prop, and from there all of you use it to get into your individual [phrases] [...] The task now is how you convey something very solid, very not individual at all, regimental, martial, into your own way of moving.*

One of the dancers asks about portraying and conveying.

**VChor** *[...] I'm interested in you together decide material that is unison material and from there it's the transformation [...]*

The choreographer tells them that the transformation is what he is interested in, but that to be able to show it they have to create a little bit of what comes before, and he wants them to do that as a group.<sup>54</sup> (He uses the drawings on the flip board to demonstrate.) RepD1 asks about the transformation and the choreographer responds to all of them. He tells the dancers to do this as a lab to research their way of moving. RepD2 asks about the transformation as well, but the choreographer clarifies that he

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<sup>54</sup> The unison material the dancers created was used, modified, in the piece, although not in quite the same context the choreographer originally envisioned, and without a transformation into individual movers.

wants them to get started on the martial movement now and make it very clear, so that they can also teach it to others. There are more questions and discussion about portraying and conveying while the dancers start to get up and moving. The choreographer tells them they have 35 minutes to create material together.

**RepD10** *Okay so how do we do this?*

The dancers start to discuss the task but the choreographer interrupts them because they are approaching it as a sum of individuals rather than as a group. RepD10 suggests they just start trying out movements and see what happens. From the circle they were standing in they begin to move, mostly on the spot, each on their own but mostly facing each other (unlike in situations where they have been asked to create something just for themselves and end up facing every which way). Many of them seem to be making use of the fencing patterns they learnt earlier. RepD9 interrupts the others to suggest a structure that makes use of the fencing pattern and they start to try it out. RepD9 gives more suggestions but the others interrupt him in turn because he is now seen to be leading the process, so they renegotiate what to do based on his first suggestion of using the fencing pattern.

RepD4 observes that they are all doing a movement in the same direction for their first (fencing-inspired) movement, so they start to each develop that.

RepD1 interjects with another idea; RepD2 responds. Others clarify and continue.

RepD9 says he has a move and shows it; RepD10 says she liked something that RepD5 did but they cannot find the same move again.

They start throwing in opinions (“I liked...”) about each other’s moves, suggestions to modify the one chosen and questions about how it goes while repeating it several

times. RepD2 calls (announces) the decision: “we all agree that’s one ↑move?” They continue to discuss the movement, making sure that they are all doing it in the same way. RepD2 reiterates that they have “one move” and some of the others repeat his words, laughing. The dancers continue on to the next move. They all try out different possibilities but very quickly RepD10 spots RepD4’s movement and gives a little cry. Everyone stops to look at RepD4’s movement. RepD9 says “nice” and without further negotiation they all start to learn RepD4’s movement, asking clarifying questions and trying it out, until RepD4 asks “do we ↑agree? on ↑that?”<sup>55</sup>

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A method of creating (making decisions about) a phrase “as a group” is gradually established. Verbal suggestions and negotiation, although used by the dancers, are also easily rejected as an individual assuming leadership, which is against the instructions. Yet there is a need to announce decisions verbally. The dancers reach a compromise: they work on the movements individually while keeping an eye on what the others are doing and picking out their movements for comment. Rather than suggest their own movement to be adopted by all, they express their appreciation of the movements they see. It is then acceptable for the dancer whose movement has been highlighted to teach it to the others, but also for them to suggest modifications. An initial decision to accept the movement is made already at the point when someone draws attention to it and no one objects, although the decision is properly announced only once others have had a chance to learn the move.

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<sup>55</sup> The requirement for everyone to agree comes from the idea of sociocracy that the choreographer introduced to the process. The question appears genuine, but is voiced with a tiny laughter that suggests that it is also asked so as to conform to this unusual formula of decision-making.

The dancers were asked to collaborate without anyone assuming leadership, which they found difficult to do. McFee is keen to recognise “the dancer as *a person*, as an agent” (2011:184; emphasis original), as someone who instantiates the dance and who contributes her “craft-mastery” to the process, but he is equally adamant that the dancer should not be called an artist when the term is used to imply authorship of the work. He recognises the dancer’s “training, skill, and hard work” but claims that “no *additional* theory for the embodiment of dance meaning is required” (McFee, 2011:184, emphasis original). Roche, on the other hand, calls for “new definitions of the divisions of labour in choreographic practice” that would recognise the “creatively collaborative” relationship between the choreographer and the dancer and focuses on the dancer’s embodied, multiple moving identity as crucial to her role (2011:106,116). This chapter asks whether and under what conditions their work together might be called collaborative.

I will examine dancers’ and choreographers’ ideas about their work roles and their definitions of choreographic collaboration. I will also discuss how the concepts of collaboration and trust as used in studies of other kinds of organisations could be applied to the dance company as a working organisation. I will argue that as long as there is a division of labour between the choreographer and the dancers in a creative process, the relationship between them might be better described in terms of co-operation and interaction than as collaboration. Fluent co-operation between dancers and choreographers depends on trusting relationships built through adequate communication. Being aware of and managing the dancers’ expectations of the kind of collaboration or co-operation a choreographic process involves is a leadership skill that may perhaps help choreographers, if they so choose, to create more harmonious work environments.

#### *4.4.2 Collaboration, cooperation, collectivity*

Several writers have drawn attention to the inherently collaborative nature of performing arts practices. Psychologist Vera John-Steiner (2000:4) claims that the “importance of cooperative work in film, musical performance, and the theatre is clear to casual observers”. Anna Pakes (2004:n.p.) writes: “[t]he performing arts necessarily involve collective production and collective action, a number of agents working together to produce performance events”. Similarly, the sociologist Susan Eriksson-Piela (2006) suggests that the creation of works of performing art is in and of itself a collective activity. Collaboration, co-operation and collective action as features of work environments are not unique to artistic processes, however. With the help of information and communication technology, organisations have become more and more distributed and connected by various networks (Huotari et al., 2005). Current organisational practices presuppose that professionals are capable of team work, co-operation, negotiation, networking and acquiring social capital even as they are competing with each other for resources, jobs, status and funding (Parviainen, 2006:157). Some organisational researchers have started to look to art organisations for inspiration on how to better understand aesthetics, bodily presence and collaborative modes of work (see e.g. Ropo & Sauer 2008).

Collaboration in the workplace is deemed inevitable rather than extraordinary, but is choreography as collaborative as the statements above suggest? Can we think of a dance company as an organisation that presupposes collaboration? Many writers have noted a shift towards more collaborative modes of making dance and other works of performing art (see e.g. Rouhiainen, 2008a, Laermans, 2013, Govan et al., 2007), but

what do we actually mean by ‘collaboration’ in artistic practices and within organisations?

The dictionary definition for ‘collaboration’ simply talks about working together:

collaboration, n. 1. United labour, co-operation; esp. in literary, artistic, or scientific work.

(OED Online)

Alexandra Kolb (2013:34) notes that collaboration as a term can refer to various kinds of combined efforts from intercultural to interdisciplinary to online collaborations. An example from management literature shows that collaboration can exist within a hierarchy as one of a set of tools at the manager’s disposal. Here is textbook advice for a manager who is faced with a conflict that requires a consensus solution:

Use *collaboration* to find an integrative solution when both sets of concerns are too important to be compromised, when your objective is to learn, when you want to merge insights from people with different perspectives or gain commitment by incorporating concerns into a consensus, and when you need to work through feelings that have interfered with a relationship.

(Robbins & Judge, 2012:225; emphasis original)

This kind of manager-led collaboration exists within an organisational structure that has at least some separation between management and subordinates and seems to differ in that respect from the kind of artistic collaboration Rouhiainen (2008a:51) is interested in:

They [performing arts] have undergone major changes reflecting increased democratization and interest in an open form. The performing arts have witnessed a shift from more hierarchical systems towards co-operative and collective participatory practices.

Rouhiainen's artistic collaboration is characterised by democracy<sup>56</sup> and diminished hierarchy, i.e. joint decision-making and shared responsibility. In order to further discuss collaboration in the performing arts, it might be useful to clarify the terminology around collaboration, co-operation and collectivity. For the purposes of analysis it might be useful, for example, to differentiate between co-operation as a mode of working together towards a common goal that does not preclude hierarchy or leadership within the group, and collaboration as a mode of working where democracy and collective decision-making are priorities. It could then be said that many artistic practices depend on co-operation by default, whereas there is a growing interest in moving from co-operation, with its undertones of compliancy, towards collaboration, a joint effort. Modes of working could also be categorised by their goals. A collaboration might be said to require a shared vision of the outcome or it may be "open-ended" in that the goal is to go wherever the process of working together – for example through improvisation – happens to lead (see Rouhiainen, 2008a:54).<sup>57</sup>

In practice, two definitions of collaboration emerge: it can be a method of working together within an organisational hierarchy, or an exercise in eschewing organisational hierarchy. Both definitions exist in the context of dance-making. Here is how one interviewee, an experienced dancer and maker, talks about collaboration:

*Performance is so often directed by somebody, a person on the outside, which a lot of people would say that everybody needs to have, but for me it's sort of fraught with problems, that relationship director-performers, and I've been in that position many times, and in both positions, both as a performer and as a sort of choreographer or director, and as a collaborator. I'm interested in **how it might be possible to make***

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<sup>56</sup> Note that "democratic" does not mean that there can be no leadership but that the leader(s) should be democratically elected: democracy refers to "[g]overnment by the people; that form of government in which the sovereign power resides in the people as a whole, and is exercised either directly by them (as in the small republics of antiquity) or by officers elected by them" (*OED*).

<sup>57</sup> For a discussion of collaboration versus collectivity, see Cvejić (2005). For the purposes of this chapter, I will treat these concepts as roughly synonymous.



***work collaboratively, how everybody is the author of the work. Sort of non-hierarchical ways of making do interest me. (FreeD1; emphasis added)***

Compare this with the view of another dancer-maker:

***That's something that I'm always aware of if I'm in someone else's process, like how do I keep this being an energised space of curiosity and permission and **how do I keep enabling this person to make. [...] I guess I've always taken that as part of my role as a collaborative dancer.** (PChor; emphasis added)***

Judging by these examples, the extent to which the power to make decisions and responsibility about the outcome are actually shared in so called collaborative processes may vary from person to person and process to process. In the first excerpt, echoing Rouhiainen's (2008a) description above, collaboration is described as non-hierarchical and authorship is shared. In the second, being a collaborator is a somewhat subordinate position: it is about enabling someone else and helping them to achieve their goals rather than claiming ownership of the work. The first interviewee does not entirely exclude the possibility of leadership in a collaborative process; the second one, similarly to how collaboration is depicted in management literature, assumes that the process has a leader. It is useful to note that in the case study referred to above the choreographer was also the employer who applied and received funding for the project and paid the dancers. Cast and paid by the choreographer, the dancers are inherently subordinate to him. Rouhiainen (2003:250) points out that "freelance dancers need to acquire jobs in dancing," which must mean complying with choreographers' wishes to some extent. As one dancer described the relationship,

***I'm there trying to fulfil whatever it is that is being asked for. (FreeD1)***

Similarly in a permanent company the dancers are at the choreographer's disposal for the creation period. The choreographer may be more or less trusted or successful as a

leader and may have more or less reason to trust or value the dancers' contribution, but he is nevertheless in a position of authority. He may choose to share some of that authority with the dancers, resulting in different relationships of co-operation, but collaboration in the sense of collective decision-making does not seem like an immediately obvious description of the relationship between a choreographer and a dancer.

When the two understandings of the concept of collaboration, non-hierarchy vs. hierarchy, collide in a process, they seem likely to create challenges for co-operation. Rather than an equal author of the work, the “collaborative dancer” is a co-worker whose job it is to support the choreographer rather than share his role. If the choreographer expects this kind of collaboration and the dancer assumes something more akin to shared authorship – or vice versa – dance-makers run the risk of communicating at cross purposes:

*You can make it seem like it's collaboration for people and then actually it's really not – [it's] collaboration with you in charge. (FreeD1)*

*Sometimes we mean collaborating but we're not collaborating and there is someone who is making all the decisions and who is setting the dynamic constantly. (FreeD2)*

Decision-making seems to be the linchpin of collaboration: collaboration for many is defined by shared decision-making, and working together becomes challenging without a common understanding of whether decisions will be made collaboratively or not. Collective decision-making, in turn, is a matter of fluent communication, which is reflected by how the interviewees emphasised the importance of communication to working collaboratively. One dancer-maker drew attention to the attractiveness of the challenge presented by collaboration and shared responsibility as functions of equal communication between the participants:

*The whole collaborative thing where we try to communicate together what it is that we're doing, it holds a fascination for me because it feels like it's much more challenging for everybody in some ways, actually. Because it's a kind of responsibility involved in that [...] we're all holding this and therefore what we offer, how we communicate our desires for what we really want, all of that is really in the mix, and that's quite rare. (FreeD1)*

Note that the interviewee admits that as a way of making, this kind of sharing of desires is “quite rare”. Yet according to the dancers it is common for them to be asked to “engage on various levels with the work”, which often means generating movement material:

*Most people don't work in a way of like here's the steps, I'm gonna teach you a load of steps. Some people do, I've certainly worked like that [...] but most of the time you're required to engage on various levels with work. (PChor)*

*In contemporary dance it feels like the dancer – even if she's not irreplaceable in each work – still she is in such a big role in producing the movement material [...] (FreeD3)*

So, the dancer often has a creative role in the choreographic process, but that does not necessarily mean that the s/he has any say in how or if her/his material will be used. This is apparent from the description one of the dancers gave of working with a particular (female) choreographer:

**FreeD4** [...] her movement making is like that. And a very collaborative process with dancers [...]

**TT** [...] You're producing the material...

**FreeD4** Yeah from the task, from her clear task [...] often actually we don't really know how she uses that material

**FreeD4** It's always a clear task to make movement, make a string of material [...] and she doesn't judge it that moment, but also we don't really know when she will use it or how she will use it.

As was the case with the totem pole phrases in Example 2 (4.2), the dancer's task is to generate material and then trust the choreographer's decisions on whether to use it and how. Can we trust the people we are working with to make the right decisions, democratically or not?

Collaboration was a desirable mode of working for many of my interviewees. The values dancers and dance-makers often seem to attach to collaboration include ownership, authorship and empowerment. Definitions vary, but collaboration seems to be something of an ethical imperative:

*I create workshops [...] because I feel like [...] it's really necessary to create a context where dancers can be articulating, not just choreographers but **dancers as collaborators can be part of a dialogue in and around dance and contribute and be encouraged to articulate their experience of it** [...] (PChor; emphasis added)*

Dancers and dance-makers alike want their contribution to be acknowledged. They want to make the best work they can. They would also like to enjoy the process. These seem to be shared goals. Can these goals be served by collaborative modes of working? The answer may be yes, but that requires that there is a consensus within the process about what collaboration means. The participants of a choreographic process – the dancers, the choreographers, the makers, the collaborators – come from varying educational backgrounds and work experiences that have shaped their expectations of what making a dance work entails – the nature of the process, the nature of collaboration – and what their role in the process will be.

*The term collaborator means so many different things in different circumstances and I think I came into this not appreciating that that is particular to my experience and assuming that everybody else knew what that plural idea was or that we would craft what that meant for this piece together. (PChor)*

What this interviewee realised was that not everyone shared his understanding of what collaboration entails and his comment highlights the need to define the parameters of a choreographic process in advance to make collaboration possible. Can/should the process have a leader or should it be non-hierarchical? How are decisions made? Who is responsible for the outcome? Regardless of whether the process is actually termed “collaborative”, addressing these questions early on in the process might contribute to better job satisfaction.

As I said at the beginning of this chapter, the search for collaborative methods in choreography is one that has parallels in other kinds of organisations, and the dancers’ wishes for meaning-sharing reflect wider changes in organisational culture. Information studies researchers Maija-Leena Huotari and Mirja Iivonen (2003:21) argue for research into “replacing general organizational structure and power-based relations by trust-based relationships” and state that managers face a challenging task in creating structures which enable collaboration and “a communicative, open organizational climate”. In other words, collaboration, however we choose to define it, requires communication and trust. With their connotations of equality and trust, collaborative modes of working are sometimes seen as a way of empowering dancers within the dance-making process. Shared decision-making and co-ownership seem to be particular concerns of collaboration in creative practices, but it is important to remember that ethical relationships in the workplace are a different goal to making the best work possible. The two certainly do not have to be mutually exclusive but neither can we say that one engenders the other.

#### 4.4.3 *Trusting me, trusting you*

Collaborative devising requires confidence for everyone involved as we face the fear of exposing personal emotional experiences and unknown pathways. Fear fixes the hierarchical roles of director and performers. The devising process requires letting go of fear, admitting to mistakes, allowing performers to speak.

(Claid, 2006:153)

As Claid explains above, collaboration is a leap into the unknown. How can we trust it will work? Trust as a function of collaboration and communication and a necessary factor in successful work relationships comes up time and again in organisational literature and deserves a closer look from a dance perspective. Organisational scholar Kurt T. Dirks (1999) notes that interpersonal trust is usually thought to improve group processes and performance. His research partially contests this assumption, suggesting instead that trust influences group performance *indirectly* through motivation: trusting relationships within the group direct motivation towards joint efforts whereas lack of trust causes group members to focus on individual achievements. Regardless of whether and how trust influences productivity, it nevertheless influences relationships and therefore work processes. We may, for example, extrapolate from Dirks' (1999) research that a dance company low in trust could be more likely than a high-trust company to have members who are competing for personal success as performers and choreographers.

In a working environment where the materials created by the dancer may be modified by a director so much as to become unrecognisable, and where material created by one dancer can be assigned to be performed by another, trust can be in short supply and something that a dancer yearns for:

*It's always nice to know that there's trust, both ways, in the work. It's a great relief to know it and receive feedback from the person you work for, who you made a contract with, that they are somehow happy with what I'm doing. (FreeD3)*

Eriksson-Piela (2006) draws attention to the role that formal and informal recognition of professional capability plays in contemporary work places: hope of recognition and doubt about one's abilities are major factors of professional identities, also in creative industries. The director of a film, or equally the choreographer of a dance production, has the power to offer recognition to her colleagues, perhaps by offering them a job, or simply by acknowledging their efforts during the process. Recognition of someone's abilities is a show of trust, which in turn is an important factor in successful collaboration.

Accepting to work for a choreographer or choosing to work with a dancer requires trust. One interviewee suspected that gaining the trust of the dancers may be more difficult for a new maker than for an established choreographer:

*I know in that circumstance [as a dancer] that it's his work and I'm not asked to engage in a kind of intellectual dialogue with it but I love the work, I've seen enough examples of the work from the outside... Maybe that's really significant that I trust that this is gonna be gorgeous and maybe there's something significant about being a new maker that you don't have a body of work behind you that people go 'I've always seen that person's work and enjoyed it' so it's quite different I suppose. (PChor)*

This interviewee hints at something that may play a role in the dancer's motivation during the creation period: believing that the work is going to meet her/his aesthetic/artistic standards may help the dancer trust that the choreographer is making the "right" decisions and make the dancer more willing to share his/her artistic expertise with the choreographer. Once committed to the process, however, the dancers' professional self-image seems to entail willingness or a sense of duty to do

their best to achieve the choreographer's vision whether they understand or agree with it or not.

Still, the choice of who to work with is not a trivial matter. John-Steiner (2000:64) claims that shared vision is essential to success in creative partnerships but that "multiple perspectives, complementarity in skills and training, and fascination with one's partner's contributions" are also needed. She also discusses the difference between mutual partnerships in science and in arts and suggests that in the arts there is a greater need for maintaining one's individuality and style (John-Steiner, 2000:73). Be that as it may, certainly a young choreographer might be eager to establish a recognisable style, thus potentially limiting his/her willingness to accept contributions from others. John-Steiner (2000:78) suggests that pursuing an artistic career requires a great deal of confidence:

A life devoted to creative work in the arts is insecure. [...] most artists have to mobilize personal, emotional, and financial resources in order to fulfil their objectives. Central to meeting such a challenge is belief in oneself and one's talent.

While an equal collaborative partnership may not seem the obvious mode of working in an environment of financial and time constraints and tough competition for visibility as individuals, it may also have its benefits: trusting and supportive relationships between collaborators can help create "the heightened self-confidence needed to overcome the weight of artistic traditions" (John-Steiner, 2000:79). According to John-Steiner, a collaboration can become an extended family of connections that offers emotional support. She calls this support "emotional scaffolding", an emotional equivalent of the models of cognitive development and function as presented in socio-cultural theories of learning. Collaborators may give each other "the gift of confidence", which they may depend on "during periods of self-doubt and rejection by



those in power” and offer other kinds of support, constructive criticism, stimulation and challenges: “[b]uilding a resilient sense of identity is aided by a self that is stretched and strengthened in partnership” (John-Steiner, 2000:127-128). One dancer-choreographer reflected on the support to one’s thinking to be gained from sharing opinions and discoveries in workshops that is not necessarily easy to find when making work:

*There’s something about workshops where you’re ... and maybe for me it’s about reassurance that I would often split the group into people watching and responding [and] people doing so that when you’re watching, I can get an indication of [...] like ‘ah wow there was something really exciting just happened then’. And maybe then in that circumstance I have an indication of a collective response to something as opposed to my own so I can have my own in my process. [...] [In my process] I’d be on the outside and go ‘ah this is really working, there’s something great about this’, but there’s no one to share it with. And I think maybe if you’re [...] a young maker and slightly paranoid there’s something about setting up the circumstance for a workshop but then sharing that experience of ‘oh here’s what we see’ and ‘why did that work’ that I really enjoy. I guess that’s just different to the process of making. (PChor)*

This feeling of support through sharing may be one of the reasons that attract people to more collaborative modes of working, but it may not be easy to achieve in a creative process. It is important to note that reciprocity and trust are key elements of collaboration:

*There’s something about setting up open-ended experiments for me which I think also gives the collaborators more chance to draw on something and propose something and, you know, be part of that creative process, so I’m very critical of the fact that I lead workshops that I talk about being for dancers as collaborators. And **I don’t know if I trusted my dancers enough to be collaborators** [...] (PChor; emphasis added)*

To return for a moment to Example 2, in the case of the totem pole/chorus line section the choreographer, unlike the dancers, had already enjoyed a period of open-ended experimentation with the task during his research for the piece. When the time came to develop the section for performance, the choreographer had an idea of what he wanted and did not need or have time to invite the dancers to explore the task in great

depth or to “propose something” of their own. Collaborative processes can be time-consuming, and the participants need to trust that the process will reach a satisfying conclusion in the time available – otherwise collaboration is likely to suffer.

Huotari and Iivonen (2003:8) suggest that trust has three basic features. Firstly, it is “based on expectations of other people’s willingness and ability to fulfil our needs and wishes [and] develops through interactions when we learn to understand other people’s expectations”. Trust develops – or fails to develop – in relationships between people and it is reciprocal: we expect it of others and they expect it of us. This implies a shared frame of reference, a normative common ground, inasmuch as the parties of a trusting relationship have to acknowledge each other’s expectations as valid. Normative trust is based on people’s behaviour being guided by shared meanings, norms and values (Huotari et al., 2005:102). It does not, however, presuppose that the shared meanings must exist from the start – suitable conditions for trust can be built over time. Secondly, “[t]rust is manifested in people’s behavioral patterns, and [...] the honesty and predictability of behavior will build a strong basis for trust” (Huotari & Iivonen, 2003:9). Even if people lack the common values that form the basis of normative trust, they can build a relationship of trust through their actions. This emphasises the communicative aspect of trust as a “sense-making process that bridges gaps between disparate groups” (Hardy et al., 1998:69). We expect others to behave in a certain way, to do or not do, and we answer others’ expectations with our actions. We look for signs of trust in actions taken. Finally, Huotari and Iivonen assert that trust makes a difference to how organisations work. Trust benefits organisations in many ways, for example by “promoting open exchange of information and knowledge and learning, enabling interactions between people and organizations, [...] and enabling work and

collaboration both within and among organizations” (Huotari & Iivonen, 2003:10). Importantly, trust helps people to tolerate uncertainty (Iivonen & Harisalo, 1997).

Dancers and choreographers generally seem to share a basis for normative trust: they know, implicitly or explicitly, the behavioural norms of the rehearsal situation and their role in the process – what to expect and what is expected of them. As long as the participants follow the conventions of the situation – for example the choreographer gives a task to generate certain kind of movement, the dancers follow his instructions, and the choreographer acknowledges their efforts by giving feedback – normative trust can exist between them. There is something slightly mechanical about this kind of trust: if the dancers want to work as dancers and the choreographer wants to work as a choreographer, they do not seem to have much choice in the matter. For instance, according to the conventions of the kind of situation described in Example 2 (4.2.1), the dancers had to trust that the choreographer would use (or not use) their totem pole phrases appropriately. The dancers may, however, give the choreographer their trust willingly, for example because they know that s/he is good at her/his job – perhaps they have seen her/his work and liked it – or simply because they happen to like him/her. Besides shared norms and values, then, trust can be based on rational or emotional judgement.

Cognitive trust is built on our perceptions of the expertise, abilities, honesty and responsibility of an individual or organisation; affective trust has to do with our emotional response to other people (Huotari et al., 2005:102-103). In their article on organisational knowledge management, J. Scott Holste and Dail Fields (2010) note that several studies show the correlation between trusting personal relationships and willingness to exchange knowledge regardless of the risks involved; they also

demonstrate that affect-based trust in particular increases actors' willingness to share tacit knowledge while cognition-based trust increases the likelihood for the shared knowledge to be used. In other words, friendship and affection make us more likely to open up to other people, while trust in other people's capabilities and honesty makes us more likely to use the knowledge they share with us; both are necessary for the sharing of tacit knowledge. As an example, normative trust may be enough for the dancer to share his/her material with the choreographer, but affective trust might encourage her/him to share material that is quite personal, while cognitive trust in the dancer's abilities might convince the choreographer to rely on the dancer's judgment in selecting material.

The difference between explicit knowledge – “documents, reports, ‘white papers’, catalogues, presentations, patents, formulas” – and tacit knowledge – “analogies, metaphors, stories, or personal strategies that reveal insight into the ‘how and why’ underlying an employee’s approach to tasks or problems” (Holste & Fields, 2010:128) is significant in a dance context. Tacit knowledge is “highly personal”, difficult to articulate and may not be expressed at all, but as Holste and Fields (2010:128) point out, “[i]n some professional organizations, much of the most useful knowledge may be tacit in nature”. This would seem to reflect the kind of knowledge dancers and choreographers are often engaged with in the studio: embodied knowledge that may be difficult or impossible to verbalise but that nevertheless informs and directs the decisions made. Consequently, affective trust may be particularly important in choreographic processes because of the type of knowledge needed to make dance works, but also because of the structure of work in the contemporary dance field. Dance is often an unsettled profession where freelancers move from project to project and share only a short amount of time with each group of colleagues. This poses

particular challenges for trust building, since there may not be time to create shared normative trust where common background is missing. So called “swift trust” is required: quick affect-based judgements that enable collaboration for the duration of the project (see Huotari et al., 2005:103-104). Simply put, swift trust means liking each other well enough to give the other the benefit of the doubt so that work can be accomplished. The dancers working on the unison task of Example 4 may have each had slightly differing expectations of how task would be structured and, as the company had not been together for long, their basis for normative trust probably was not entirely robust from the start. However, they also knew that they had only a short time to accomplish the task of creating material together, and so rather than discuss their expectations to consolidate the normative trust between them they had to get on with the work at hand.

The dance-making process could be seen as an effort to mine the tacit knowledge reserves of the dancers and dance-makers in order to produce a new dance work, and therefore the ability and willingness of the participants to share their own and acknowledge and use other people’s tacit knowledge is crucial. Studies have found that the successful transfer of tacit knowledge depends on trusting relationships (Govan et al., 2006). This is in part due to the risk and uncertainty involved in sharing tacit knowledge – losing one’s competitive advantage by sharing one’s expertise (Holste & Fields, 2010:130) or perhaps exposing oneself to personal criticism. Good personal relations increase the willingness to share knowledge, but “some confidence that the knowledge will be appropriately and professionally used” is also required (Holste & Fields, 2010:135). Trusting and using shared knowledge involves the risk of failure. This may be a very high risk for a choreographer, who is often billed as the author of the work regardless of the input of the dancers (see Roche, 2009). Does the

choreographer risk accepting dancers' opinions, offers or criticism during the process or are the stakes simply too high for that level of trust? Might not-trusting one's co-workers or subordinates be an artistically valid choice? Huotari and Iivonen (2003:15) certainly would not endorse it if the process is meant to be in any way collaborative: "[w]ithout trust, different opinions and views could easily be interpreted to be hostile and the benefits of collaboration would be lost". Perhaps it would be more important to ask whether not collaborating could be an artistically valid choice in a society that values and favours collaboration as an ethically appropriate working relationship.

Overall, my interviewees' experiences support the literature on trust: trust develops in relationships as people get to know each other. It requires interaction over time, but, again, time is a luxury that many choreographic processes lack. Dancers do, however, have a nonverbal shortcut to trusting each other: seeing someone – a choreographer or a dancer – dancing provides the knowledgeable onlooker an instant impression of their professional capabilities and thus a basis for "swift" trust.

***TT** Do you trust him?*

***RepD8** I like his movement quality when he is dancing, so when he is showing how to do things, movements, I share the same opinion.*

Working together in close physical contact with one another not only requires but also generates trust. The face-to-face nature of dancers' work has an inbuilt advantage over many other work environments in that it provides daily opportunities for frequent interaction, thus speeding up the process of getting to know one's co-workers and learning to trust them. Of course having the chance for trust-building does not always result in trust being built – many other factors besides spending time together influence the development of relationships, and "forcing people to work together for a long

period of time (creating familiarity) will not necessarily create friendship (liking), trust, or cohesion” (Dirks, 1999:446). Trust can also start vicariously: if someone we already know and trust – a boss, a colleague – seems to trust someone we do not know, we are probably more likely to give the new person the benefit of the doubt than if we were considering her purely on her own merits, as little or as much as we know of them. This kind of transferred trust is very fragile, though, because it is based on projections, and may lead to disappointment.

The importance of trust as a bridge across moments of doubt and uncertainty during the creation process appeared quite clearly in the interviews. One of the dancers described her job as “commitment”, and a significant aspect of that commitment is trusting the choreographer even if you are uncertain about the work and especially if you suspect that so is the choreographer:

*Sometimes choreographers need trust when they're acting out, when they're being a bit defensive because they're scared and they don't quite know what they're doing. I think it comes down to trusting the process in a way, so it comes to a certain point in the process, about a week before the end maybe, even a bit before then, where it's the crunch time. Honestly most choreographers tend to have a little bit of a panic and they might be slightly irrational or a bit sharp or snippy [...] but when you come to that point you just have to knuckle down, get on with it, and you have to trust the choreographer and be encouraging and say it's gonna be fine. You have trust yourself, I suppose, in order to trust the process, and then trust the choreographer as well. (RepD11)*

Several dancers mentioned this need for trust during a process and its connection with their information needs. They are balancing between establishing and maintaining an active, informed position in the process on the one hand and letting the choreographer get on with his job on the other hand. Asking questions can clear things up but also slow the process down or lead it along a sidetrack.

*Questioning is really good [...] but sometimes you also need to trust the people on the outside that they are in control of what's happening [...] I guess it's asking oneself if*

*what I'm going to ask is really necessary because from the outside you realise how much one question slows things down. (RDir)*

*You need to have a bit of faith in the choreographer. If something doesn't feel like it's going well you can't let that affect you mentally, you can't get kind of negative about it. [...] There's always gonna be moments when you're having doubts about yourself or doubts about decisions they made or doubts about the overall piece but you really can't let that affect you in any way. You need to look at every day as a kind of a fresh canvas and let the choreographer take care of things that aren't working. (RepD3)*

Trusting the choreographer may come quite naturally to the dancers if they agree with his methods and vision but this is not always the case. Commitment may be insincere; trust freely given may be withdrawn if it is shown to be without foundation.

*I trust him and what whatever the result is. I'm enjoying the process so I'm not asking for more [information]. (RepD4)*

*If you're not really into something and you're not believing in the piece then it's quite difficult, because most of the people you work for are nice but if they're making something that you think it's rubbish [...] you can only give so much of yourself. You end up faking it I guess to some extent. [...] Sometimes you need the work and it's like okay, this isn't the best thing but I need to go with it and I need to make it the best experience. (RepD3)*

*When you trust a choreographer you kind of expect them to do their job as well and take the piece forward. (RepD11)*

If trust can be established early on in the process, whether through first or third person knowledge of the choreographer's earlier work or verbal and nonverbal interaction in the studio, there may be less need for information-sharing as a means of building trust during the later stages of the process. Trust may, however, be lost as well as gained, and may need to be renegotiated during the process. Aware of potential pitfalls, choreographers may try to nourish the dancers' trust in the process:

**VChor** *Although what we are going to do now [the first run], it might sound a bit random, for you we put just scenes together, all this four weeks has developed to arrive to this point a little bit. So what I'm asking you right now a little bit is trust that knowledge that you might not have recall of, what*



*you're not very conscious of, but over the last four weeks we've fed your body and your experience and your mind  
((arms alternately rotating from elbow, miming a piling up of stuff inwards))  
and etc. etc. etc., with lots of information [...] so just let things happen, because, trust that knowledge that you already have.*

Holste and Fields (2010) argue that in an organisation where tacit knowledge sharing is vital, leaders should aim to encourage the formation of trusting relationships. This may be achieved by promoting “frequent direct engagement of co-workers in collaborative processes – especially situations that illustrate interdependency and provide opportunity for workers to demonstrate individual competency” (Holste & Fields, 2010:136). An example of these kinds of processes in choreographic practice could be dancers engaging in duet work to create material within the process: interdependent but also showing their individual abilities. The need for trust-building opportunities can also be seen in the dancers’ wishes to share and witness each other’s and the choreographer’s work through talking about what they are doing:

*We talk so that we can all be on the same page and understand what we’re doing, and then we do something and then we talk about what’s happened, and both of them are feeding each other. (FreeD1)*

*I like to do, doing physically, but for that doing to have some more information I feel like you also need to talk about it – not for days on end but somehow mixing the two. And through the doing and the talking about it you always find something new to latch onto... (FreeD3)*

Opportunities for sharing experiences and information support understanding and trust; trust encourages people to share experiences and information. Trust and communication are intertwined. Where there is trust, people can communicate openly without worrying that what they say will be used against them (McInerney, 2002:1014). Even if trust is lacking, the more we interact the more we learn about each other’s expectations, which is a means of learning to trust each other. Collaboration in

an atmosphere of mistrust is forced and rule-bound but may still be worth pursuing because it encourages and depends on interaction, which in turn enables trust to be built (Huotari & Iivonen, 2003:17). However, it is also worth remembering that language is not the only form of interacting and, as important as talking is, trust-building communication can also be non-verbal. Sharing the space and physical contact can also be effective ways to build trust within a choreographic process.

#### *4.4.4 Managing cooperation?*

The general shift in organisations towards collective knowledge production means that leaders face a new challenge as facilitators of learning and development. They are expected to inspire themselves and others to achieve ever greater efficiency and constant improvement through taking each individual into consideration, providing intellectual stimulation, and being charismatic, courageous, reliable, flexible, honest, fair and respectful (Eriksson, 2006). A dance company, whether a more permanent ensemble or a temporary coming together of freelancers, is not only a creative enterprise but also a place of work, a group of colleagues, an organisation that needs to be managed. How much of this management task falls under the choreographer's control varies from company to company and project to project, but unless the choreographer is working on a solo or sharing all tasks and decisions with collaborators, somehow s/he needs to lead the dancers through the creation process. A process needs a starting point and decisions need to be made along the way. While the idea for a piece can have a collective origin and decisions on how to proceed with it can be made collectively, in both of my case studies the choreographer brought to the company his vision for the piece and had the final say in all decision-making. The dancers had a crucial role in realising the choreographer's vision and their feedback

influenced the choreographer's decisions, but it was the choreographer's task to invite and manage their input – to lead the collaboration, if you will.

This is the challenge in a culture that favours collaborative arts processes but also requires efficiency: “genuine” collaboration, involving shared decision-making, is neither quick nor easy. With a moderate addition of leadership co-operation may thrive in art forms that are supposedly collaborative by nature. Writing about the independent film industry, Eriksson-Piela (2006) analyses three different strands of power in the role of the film director: the possibility to choose who to work with, the right to make final decisions regarding the outcome, and leadership within the collective. Eriksson-Piela acknowledges that making a film requires collective effort, but at least in the independent film sector the director is usually in charge of how the process is run, who will take part in it and what shape their contribution will take. This rings true for a choreographic process as well. Permanent companies notwithstanding, the choreographer can often choose the dancers s/he wants to employ. The choreographer is in charge of making sure that on opening night the company has a piece to put on stage. Inside the studio, s/he has the power to choose who will work with whom, on what material, and how to use that material. Yet s/he also depends on the dancers' creative co-operation in generating, editing and performing the material of the piece.

Eriksson-Piela's interviewees associate collectivity in film-making with striving for harmonious and fluent collaboration and emphasise that since the director is responsible for the success of the film, it is useful for him/her to be aware of the working habits of the participants in the process to ensure that the project runs smoothly. Nevertheless, they also remark that unpredictable things may happen in professional communities and that the director may sometimes have to be quite

authoritarian to make sure that everyone knows what the goals are and what their role is in achieving them. The film director's leadership, then, has two dimensions: the interactive skills that contribute to creating a pleasant and productive atmosphere, and the direct and even ruthless use of decision-making power necessary to achieve results with a temporary collective of people in a limited amount of time (Eriksson-Piela, 2006:304).

Claid (2006:147), describing her experience of being in "a directorial role" in collaborative work, presents a somewhat different take on leadership in collaboration. In 1993, she directed "Back to Front with Side Shows" (1993) for CandoCo Dance Company, a contemporary dance company of disabled and non-disabled dancers. Claid first of all rejects the idea of herself as a visionary in the process:

The performers were not there to realize my vision. I was there to realize theirs, to facilitate their stories. My role at the early stage of the devising process was to hold open the door, creating the space so that the performers, as people, could discover their own performance.

(Claid, 2006:151)

Rather than a task-setter with "pre-conceived ideas" she was a choreographer who "resisted choreographing" until the performers had created their material (2006:151). This kind of devising process allows the performers "to own the material" and can be a goal in and of itself, but if the goal of the process is to present a product of dance theatre, directorial editing – shaping the work through "edited timing and directed space" – is required (Claid 2006:153).<sup>58</sup> Thus in a consciously collaborative process there is still room and need for a kind of leadership: for knowing "how to open the

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<sup>58</sup> A polished product may well not be the goal – Claid also writes about "Grace & Glitter" (1987), a "collectively devised experiment" performed by Extemporary Dance Theatre that "emphasised process over product in an empowering experience for women dancers" (2006: 153).

space for the material to emerge” and when to stop facilitating and start “shap[ing] that material so it can be accessible to the audience” (Claid 2006:151).

Business literature describes collaboration as a way of structuring work in certain situations. It is a tool that managers can use to increase productivity, and the ability to sustain collaboration can be regarded as a leadership skill. In a networked world of global organisations, collaboration often happens out of necessity. Choreographers may well resort to using collaboration within the group of dancers as a problem-solving tool or to promote cohesion in the group. Giving dancers tasks to create duet material or to solve how to create a particular image can be seen as using collaboration in a similar way to how it is presented in organisational theories. For the sake of clarity, however, we might want to call it something other than ‘collaboration’, considering the notion of non-hierarchy often associated with the term in an arts context.

Educational theorists Kai Hakkarainen and Sami Paavola (2006:243-244) claim that significant advances in any human endeavours are impossible to achieve without the distribution of intellectual efforts in social networks and that there is always a significant collective dimension to human expertise. In the context of dance, both dancers and choreographers rely on a long history of development in dance forms, training, choreographic conventions, etc. Since artistic value cannot be readily measured, the question remains whether the mode of working has any impact on the artistic or economic value of the outcome of the choreographic process. If we concede that artistic outcomes as organisational goals differ significantly from the aims of business and public organisations, they might justify or even demand a different approach in organisational strategy, whether eschewing collaboration completely or embracing collectivity wholeheartedly. We might even argue that the purpose of

artistic processes is to question the normative status quo. However, creative industries function within a wider social, cultural political and economic framework, and arts organisations wishing to co-operate with other organisations may need to justify their position if they act against current societal norms, ethical or otherwise.

## 4.5 Making sense of dance-making

### 4.5.1 Example 5: Directed by the rehearsal director

The choreographer has given the group tasks for the afternoon. RepD5 and RepD6 have been creating a duet (the one also featured in Example 1) incorporating two bamboo poles that are sturdy enough to take their weight. They are sent to another studio to work on the duet. The rehearsal director asks the choreographer where he wants him and is asked to go with RepD5 and RepD6.<sup>59</sup> The dancers begin to run through the material they have; the rehearsal director settles down to watch them. Once he has seen the material, he begins to comment on it and suggest ways to improve it. The dancers try out his suggestions and corrections which are either fairly seamlessly incorporated into what they were doing or cause problems that need to be worked out, including reiterating and defining the suggestion more clearly to solving difficulties in execution. The following excerpt depicts one such problem-solving situation. The phrase includes RepD5 going into a supported inversion on/against RepD6, RepD6 repeating the same against RepD5 and RepD5 taking his weight and carrying him around in a small circle before putting him down; this is the bit of the sequence discussed below.

The RDir has given the dancers feedback on a section which they now repeat until he interrupts them again.

**RDir** good (.) °stop there (.) when you get down° ((from a handstand))

**RepD5** ((grunt))

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<sup>59</sup> Both are new to the group and among the youngest; RepD5 is an apprentice.

**RepD6** ((grunt))

**RDir** um ((gets up from sitting))

**RepD5 & RepD6** ((break from the sequence and turn towards the RD))

**RDir** the pace gets a bit (.)

((walks to the dancers))

it's it's (.) it (.) it slows (.) (there was) excitement

((gestures with arms))

and then the pace takes the excitement away because it (.) of the mechanics of it so you just need to find a way to let the mechanics service the (.) energy if that makes sense rather than the (.)

((copies the beginning of the phrase))

cause you do this (.) this he comes on to you I think this should I mean are you being are you (.) trying to hold it cause I don't know whether holding it (.) whether it should be that he comes he goes and you go straight into your (.) and also I think when he goes when [RepD6] comes onto you [RepD5] I don't think you should hold him (.) and then ↑go (.) he should be able to come onto you and you begin walking as he gets onto you

**RepD5** ah okay

**RDir** if that makes sense (.) because otherwise we get we get him on you

((bends forward and slaps his shoulder))

and then we get the

((stomps around in a small circle as if carrying something on his back))

circling which (.) the rhythm of (.) to and fro disappears somewhat

((backs into his sitting position on the side))

**RepD5 & RepD6** ((get into position to start the sequence again))

**RepD5** what about this (.)

((starts the sequence))

right before (.) that this

((they do their movements))

is the ↑time?

**RDir** yeah

**RepD5** okay

**RepD5 & RepD6** ((continue the sequence))



**RepD5** ((moves to a handstand against RepD6))  
so I go  
((comes down))  
I don't I don't stay (.) ↑yeah

**RDir** he gets he gets your limit but I don't think holding it (.)

**RepD6** [okay

**RepD5** ((nods))

**RDir** [serv- I don't know I don't know whether it serves anything unless [the choreographer]'s told you to hold it?

**RepD5** ((shakes head))

**RepD5 & RepD6** ((repeat the handstand, RepD5 comes down, RepD6 swings onto RepD5))

**RDir** go (.) yeah

**RepD5** ((walks around in a small circle carrying RepD6 and puts him down))

**RepD6** yeah ↑again

RepD6's landing was awkward. The dancers move back to starting positions and try the sequence again. This time the landing is even clumsier: RepD6 falls before he is meant to and gives a short laugh. The RDir wanted the dancers to change the timing and dynamics of a movement, which they managed on their first try. Now they have discovered a problem with the landing that follows, and the RDir lets the dancers solve this problem on their own.

**RDir** the energy is really nice and then you just figure how (.) how (.) to

The dancers repeat the same sequence, skipping a little bit of the beginning and focusing on the problem. RepD6's landing is still no better.

**RepD6** *um*

**RepD5** *(do you want)*  
*((marks the movement of putting RepD6 down))*

**RepD6** *well it's just that (.)*  
*((walks the route of RepD5's circle))*  
*at the end I (.) I feel like*  
*((demonstrates a fall))*  
*I'm falling that way*

**RepD5** *I try to*  
*((tries a squatting movement bending forward))*  
*lean ↑front?*  
*((looks at RepD6))*

**RepD6** *((turns the same way as RepD5 was facing and leans to the opposite direction from where he is supposed to land))*  
*can you be at a bit lower on that side?*

**RepD5** *yeah exactly but I I leave you*  
*((demonstrates how he has been putting RepD6 down))*  
*in your side I can try leave you*  
*((shows the movement leaning towards the other direction))*

**RepD6** *huh*

**RepD5** *let's see*

**RepD6** *so maybe*  
*((repeats the lean to the other direction))*  
*more down instead of*  
*((repeats RepD5's earlier movement))*

**RepD5** *((repeats the movement of putting RepD6 down))*  
*I normally do this (.) so I just*  
*((shifts towards the other side))*

**RepD6** *okay let's try again*

The dancers repeat the sequence from the beginning. This time RepD6's landing works, which RepD5 acknowledges by saying "yeah" while they dance, and they

continue onwards, only to stop at the very next movement (another kind of handstand) with the RDir stepping in to advise them.

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The whole exchange is roughly three minutes long and concentrates on a movement sequence that takes about eight seconds to perform. Much of the transcript seems somewhat inane because speech is accompanied by near-constant movement. The participants' movements not only make sense of all the deictic expressions – “this” usually relates to a simultaneous movement – but also fill in most of the syntactic gaps in the utterances – “so I just [move like this]”. Even though the rehearsal director's feedback seems quite verbal, much of the information is actually carried by his re-enactment of the movements he is talking about – often a cursory marking to give an idea of which movement, direction or dynamic he is talking about and at times an exaggerated caricature of something he would like changed.

Dance-makers sometimes refer to creating choreographies as “making work”. The expression refers to dances/performances/choreographies as works of art but also evokes the idea of art-making as work. It implies action and craft and connotes the effort of making something work, finding out what works. In this chapter, I will bring together the doing of work and the making of art through the concept of sensemaking. I will look at dance-making as a group practice that defines and is defined by a community of dance-makers. The purpose of this last part of my analysis is, firstly, to examine the foundations of dance companies as organisations: how dancers and choreographers negotiate organisational membership and participation in dance-making. Secondly, from how work is organised I will move on to how work is made: how artistic and/or practical decisions are made and justified in choreographic

processes. How do dancers and choreographers make sense of dance-making? This is perhaps the closest we can get to pinning down the elusive connection between a type of process and its resulting product.

#### *4.5.2 Introduction to sensemaking*

Sensemaking, as pioneered by organisational psychologist Karl E. Weick, is a widely influential concept in organisation studies, often used in the context of social constructionist research (Brown et al., 2014).<sup>60</sup> For Weick (1995:170, 171) a “sensible event is one that resembles something that has happened before” and “[s]ensemaking is an ongoing effort to deal with that which is unique and transient”. The same idea could be expressed in terms of learning: we have learnt how to deal with situations similar to those we have encountered before but situations that are significantly different to our past experiences (even if only because we were not expecting them to reoccur) require problem-solving and learning – making sense. Sensemaking is required “whenever the current state of the world is perceived to be different from the expected state of the world” (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005:414), and in a social context these “shared histories of learning” initiate communities of practice (Wenger, 1998:86). In a choreographic process, sensemaking begins with the “disruptive ambiguity” of the new work, continues with “noticing and bracketing” possible ways forward, followed perhaps by labelling sections or tasks to work on, making presumptions about what will be useful, or possible, or what will work, all the while

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<sup>60</sup> Basbøll (2010) criticises Weick, in particular his 1995 book *Sensemaking in Organizations*, for lack of academic rigour and even outright plagiarism. Weick is nevertheless referred to as an authority in all the organisational sensemaking literature that I have come across.

communicating to negotiate meanings and organise further action (see Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005:413).

Despite its popularity, ‘sensemaking’ has no standard definition in organisation studies (see e.g. Brown et al., 2014:266). Weick, Kathleen M. Sutcliffe and David Obstfeld (2005:409) emphasise the verbal nature of sensemaking: for them, it is “an issue of language, talk, and communication. Situations, organizations, and environments are talked into existence”. As with interaction analysis (see 3.3.3), others advocate a more embodied approach that resonates better with the physicality of choreographic processes. Celia V. Harquail and Adelaide Wilcox King (2010:1621) claim that

beliefs about an organization’s identity are produced, formed, and enacted through the member’s embodied interactions with abstracted ideas, physical artifacts, and instantiated bodies that a member associates with an organization.<sup>61</sup>

This is in line with Ann Cunliffe and Chris Coupland’s (2011:63) argument that “we make our lives, ourselves and our experience ‘sensible’ in embodied interpretations and interactions with others”. Anne Warfield Rawls (2011:399) also emphasises the interactive nature of sensemaking when she argues that making sense is a cooperative process that requires fluency in using “constitutive orders of practice”:

the expectations about interaction (e.g. in a classroom, or at a dinner party) or the skills constitutive of a particular job – make available for those participants who are competent to perform and committed to that specific practice – for the duration – a set of meaningful social objects and actions that do not exist for those who are not competent to and participating in the practice (members of a practice).

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<sup>61</sup> Harquail and King (2010) focus on organisational identity as people’s thoughts and beliefs about an organisation; Weick et al. (2005:416) discuss organisational identity from an individual point of view: “who we think we are (identity) as organisational actors shapes what we enact and how we interpret [i.e. make sense], which affects what outsiders think we are (image) and how they treat us, which stabilizes or destabilizes our identity”.

Rawls' treatment of "meaning as a matter of mutual cooperation (or interaction)" (2011:396), although valid for any kind of interaction, seems particularly well suited to the discourse in and around creative artistic processes.

In the following discussion, I will use 'sensemaking' in a very broad sense to mean any primarily social/interactive, verbal or nonverbal action taken to deal with changing or unfamiliar circumstances and events. I will also argue that to understand sensemaking in choreographic processes we need to unpick the meaning of 'sense' itself. Sensemaking in organisation studies is typically to do with 'sense' as "meaning" or "signification", but this is only the third main group of definitions of 'sense' in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. I would suggest that it is not the primary connotation of 'sense' in connection with dance and choreography either. Rather, sense refers to sensing, the "faculty of perception or sensation," and "actual perception or feeling" (the first and second main groups of OED definitions of 'sense' respectively). A dancer comes to terms with movement primarily by experiencing it rather than signifying it by other means, although verbalising and labelling can certainly be part of the process.

In this chapter, I will apply a sensemaking perspective to both the social context of dance-making, i.e. dance companies as communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and the artistic processes that take place within these communities. I will first discuss my case study companies as communities of practice, and sensemaking as it relates to forming and maintaining these communities. Coming to terms with the various aspects and practices of new working environments (companies, venues, choreographers, dancers, timetables, funding, commission brief, etc.) requires practical sensemaking that enables the community of practice to keep working towards its goals, but much that may be new in each process to some of the participants will be

quite familiar to most of them: choreographic methods, movement vocabularies, staging conventions (even when “unconventional”), rehearsal spaces, how processes are structured, etc. Even a process-based freelance company can rely on working conditions that are in many ways predictable. Knowing how to behave in these circumstances is something dance professionals have had to learn and apprentices are in the process of learning in order to become full members of the dance community of practice. Familiarity with particular kinds of artistic processes and working methods is a membership-defining factor of the dance community of practice – which is not to say that dancers do not have to make sense of each choreographer’s individual methods while choreographers have to make sense of the kind of dancer(s) they are working with.<sup>62</sup>

Secondly, I will focus on sensemaking as it relates to artistic decision making. In a business organisation, sensemaking is typically related to strategic planning and decision-making, for example identifying cues for action in the business environment and plotting them into existing procedures (Abolafia, 2010), or implementing strategic change in conversation with stakeholders (Rouleau, 2005). In a choreographic process much of the sensemaking takes place within the local community of practice and stems from a need to come to terms with the unknown elephant in the room: the new piece being made. This, one suspects, is the most “unique and transient” aspect of any choreographic process, even if only to a degree and within a particular genre and oeuvre:

Choreography is a very specific process. Not only do different choreographers have their own unique methods of making dances, but each dance within a repertory is generated through particular means. Part of what gives a dance its identity lies in the discovery of its own choreographic

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<sup>62</sup> Permanent companies that work with a resident choreographer probably have less sensemaking to do in this respect.

technique. For if we were to trace the real history of any given dance, we would find its source in a variety of changing elements in the choreographer's experience. The germination of an idea based upon visions and feelings is but one of these elements. The rehearsal space is both a limit and a resource.

(Martin, 1990:91-92)

What is being made, why and how? A choreographic process is a process of making sense of the work that is being created, both individually and collectively, through talking and doing. This is 'sense' as both signification and perception, sense and sensing. I will argue that these two aspects are inextricably linked in "choreographic sensemaking," which could be seen as a heightened example of what Cunliffe and Coupland (2011:64) call our "embodied narrative sensemaking" of our lives. Artistic decision-making, which often is about things "feeling right" (or not) and "working" (or not), reflects a narrative rationality (Fisher, 1985). According to Fisher's narrative paradigm, humans are storytellers whose decisions are made based on "good reasons", that is, our historically, culturally and personally defined judgements of whether an instance of communication "provides a reliable, trustworthy, and desirable guide to thought and action in the world" (Fisher, 1985:351). Our narrative rationality is based on values rather than on logically sound arguments.<sup>63 64</sup>

The social and the artistic aspects of sensemaking in choreographic processes, although separated in this discussion, are mutually influential. Practical considerations and personal relations – e.g. what is affordable and who works well with whom – affect artistic decisions and vice versa. The connections between the social context of a process and its artistic product may be highly significant, even if they are hard to

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<sup>63</sup> Weick et al. (2005:415) see sensemaking as "continued redrafting of an emerging story" rather than a search for a single truth.

<sup>64</sup> According to Fisher (1985:355), "good communication is good by virtue of its satisfying the requirements of narrative rationality, that it offers a reliable, trustworthy, and desirable guide to belief and action".



define. Importantly, however, social and artistic sensemaking are not interchangeable as foundations for decision-making. Artistic decisions can rest on the premise of something feeling (or not feeling) right; decisions that concern for example fair pay or health and safety cannot.

#### 4.5.3 *Patterns of participation in dance companies*

Educational theorist Etienne Wenger and social anthropologist Jean Lave (1991) first introduced the idea of communities of practice in their work on situated learning. I will mostly rely on Wenger's work on the concept in his book *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (1998). Wenger's interest is in understanding how learning is fundamental to our social existence – “learning is so fundamental to the social order we live by that theorizing about one is tantamount to theorizing about the other” (1998:15) – and crucial to organisational development.<sup>65</sup> His social theory of learning is founded on a combination of “deeply interconnected and mutually defining” concepts: meaning, practice, community, identity, and learning (1998:5).

I will briefly introduce Wenger's theory and suggest how it might relate to dance companies, and apply it to some more specific questions about dancer-choreographer relations and choreographic processes. I want to understand what is happening when a dancer in an interview or private discussion somewhat despondently declares that “it's his piece”, or when she has an idea during rehearsals and asks “can I say something?” A choreographer asks the dancers to create something “together” and they end up struggling to figure out what that means; the dancer wonders what is going to become of the piece and feels unsure of her role in it; a moment in the piece becomes

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<sup>65</sup> Learning organisations/organisational learning have been the topic and indeed goal of much organisational management research. See e.g. the journal *The Learning Organization*.

so pregnant with meaning in rehearsal that it leaves her gushing with emotion afterwards. The choreographer has to learn the part of a dancer to perform it, or leaves the dancers to sort out a problem they have because they are the experts in what they do. How do these fleeting moments of navigating the social structures of choreographic processes reflect the relationships of the people involved?

#### 4.5.3.1 (Dance) communities of practice

Meaning (“learning as experience”) as invoked by Wenger refers to “our ability to experience the world and our engagement with it as meaningful” and is the end-product of learning (1998:4).<sup>66</sup> It is interesting to have this view in mind when discussing the dancer’s contribution or agency with respect to the creation and performance of dances. In her PhD dissertation *The Dancer’s Contribution: Performing Plotless Choreography in the Leotard Ballets of George Balanchine and William Forsythe* (2012), Tamara Tomic-Vajagic (2012:304) writes about how some dancers focus only on interpreting their own role while others are interested in how their part fits into the full work:

Dancers respond to multiple issues when they interpret their leotard ballet roles. The performers’ focus may be narrow – paying attention solely to their own role, or wider – some dancers explicitly observe how their part fits into the context of the full work.

In other words, dancers engage with the role and the work in different ways in order to make their work personally meaningful. They do this “in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what [they] do” (Wenger, 1998:47), that

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<sup>66</sup> “Knowledge is a matter of competence with respect to valued enterprises” while “[k]nowing is a matter of participating in the pursuit of such enterprises, that is, of active engagement in the world” (Wenger, 1998:4).

is, they engage in social practice (“learning as doing”). (According to Wenger, practice is, in fact, always social.) This includes aspects like company culture and social relations, the history of the piece and the role and the methods that are in place for creating/learning a role in the community.

Negotiation of meaning can happen through language but also through any other means of communication, and it can but does not necessarily result in agreement. When one of the dancers had an idea during rehearsals and asked “can I say something?” he was negotiating (in the sense of managing or passing through a tricky bit of the road) the boundary between his role and that of the leader of the process. In Wenger’s (1998:54) theory meaning “exists neither in us, nor in the world, but in the dynamic relation of living in the world”; similarly, “[w]ho we are lies in the way we live day to day, not just in what we think or say about ourselves, though that is of course part (but only part) of the way we live”. This is an important point to keep in mind: the identities dancers and choreographers present in interviews are only one aspect of a complex relationship with the world; by observing their actions outside the interview situation – and through concepts other than those most prominent in their minds – we get a more rounded picture of the whole community.

Community (“learning as belonging”), in Wenger’s terminology, refers to “the social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognizable as competence” (1998:5). The dancer’s ability to interpret and perform a leotard ballet role is relevant in the context of the dance company and by extension the wider community of dance professionals and audience but it does not make her a competent baker, parent or surgeon. She could well be any or all of these things, but her competence in these areas would be judged by the standards of other

communities of practice (Great British Bake Off, family, hospital), centred around engagement in other activities. They would all play a part in her identity (“learning as becoming”) – how learning has made her who she is (Wenger, 1998:5) – but only a marginal one in her professional identity as a dancer. There may, however, be ways in which her multimembership, as Wenger calls it, of various communities of practice is relevant to her professional practice. For example, a freelance dancer or choreographer involved in multiple projects at the same time may have to modify her participation in those projects in terms of time and effort spent on each. When one of the choreographers had to learn the part of a dancer to perform it he was exemplifying multimembership and, in a very practical way, performing “the work of reconciliation necessary to maintain one identity across boundaries” (Wenger, 1998:158).

As is becoming obvious, communities of practice are everywhere (practice is everywhere). They are not limited to professional organisations, and even while talking about professional communities of practice we can define them in various ways.<sup>67</sup> Communities of practice may overlap and they are interconnected, forming constellations of communities that may collaborate and/or compete. We can think of the dancers of a company forming their own community of practice, perhaps including the choreographer they work with in the studio, but we can also extend the community to include other people working for the company (artistic director, stage manager, technical manager, administrator, costume designer, etc.). We can even think about all contemporary dancers (all professional dancers? all dance professionals? all dancers?)

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<sup>67</sup> It should be noted, as Wenger (1998:76-77) does, that community in this context is a neutral term. Communities can be pleasant and harmonious or quarrelsome and cliquey – it all fits under the umbrella of participation.

forming a kind of wider community of practice, which can be useful considering the considerable mobility of dancers from project to project, company to company.

#### 4.5.3.2 Defining membership

The world is constantly changing, which means that practices are always being “reinvented” (Wenger, 1998:94). The itinerant nature of contemporary dance careers has interested many dance researchers (e.g. Foster, 1997, Wulff, 1998, Roche, 2009, 2011, Roos, 2015) particularly from the point of view of the dancer’s identity and the training requirements of a variable career. Wenger’s learning-centred view encourages us to also consider the work of the individuals as they form these ever-changing communities (companies) of practice. As Wenger (1998:130) suggests, people from very different backgrounds will probably need to work more towards establishing a community of practice, to negotiate more to achieve mutual engagement, joint enterprise, shared repertoire (see Wenger, 1998:73-85). This is the work of a group of freelance dancers coming together for a project from five different countries, speaking four different languages, trained in different institutions, experienced in different methods of working and styles of dancing, as they did in the Freelance Production. One of two dancers working on the duet task in Example 5 explained in an interview why they had had a particularly productive day:

*I think we just need to ... we had a chance to know each other. I mean I didn't know [the other dancer] before and I didn't know how he actually dance[s] and he didn't know me, and maybe we need [a] few days just to see how the other guy works and how we can put things together. Yeah, I think we've done a lot of material that day. (RepD6)*

This is also why a superficially simple improvisation task can spark a lengthy discussion about different approaches to making work – “practising the eyes of the

other” versus “tricking yourself so that you’re not always in what you know”, “space/time/action” versus “emotional content” – as dancers and choreographer alike grapple for meaning, trying to connect their individual interpretation of the task to what they know about the piece they are making.

Practice is what members of a work community develop, interdependently, to enable them to do their job and to make their experience at work as satisfying and pleasant as possible. This includes, among other things, “align[ing] their activities and their interpretations of events with structures, forces, and purposes beyond their community of practice” (Wenger, 1998:173).<sup>68</sup> When the Visiting Choreographer towards the end of the choreographic process left the dancers to sort out a problem amongst themselves, he recognised that he had learnt through practice and formed a learning organisation (see Wenger, 1998:249).

Participation is the active process of “doing, talking, thinking, feeling, and belonging” that describes our experiences of membership in social (work) communities and our involvement in their enterprises (Wenger, 1998:47, 55). To return to the hypothetical dancer who (at the beginning of 4.5.3) worried about what the work was going to amount to, or had a strong emotional response to something during rehearsals, we can see that s/he is engaging in what matters in his/her community and, in the first instance, perhaps questioning whether everyone else is, too. “Negotiating a joint enterprise gives rise to relations of mutual accountability among those involved,” Wenger (1998:81) observes. Lack of trust in the process is a sign of this negotiation not being finished

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<sup>68</sup> Alignment, along with engagement and imagination, is one of three modes of belonging that Wenger discusses in the context of identity formation.

yet (not that it ever is completely) as different people seem to place importance on different things.

Many of the dancers I spoke to thought of their profession as a kind of calling and a(n underpaid) privilege that comes with high expectations of commitment – looking after one's health, fitness and professional development as well as commitment to artistic goals and the reputation of the company:

*What is my job? [...] I have a duty or responsibility to the group, to the name of the company, firstly to be kind of actively involved and committed to every process. I have a duty to push myself in order that we can kind of make progress as a group, so that we're not just a company that's regurgitating very similar things each time. (RepD3)*

Dancers take pride in producing work that meets the technical and artistic standards of the choreographer, the audience, critics, and other dance professionals. Meeting these expectations is how they align themselves within broader structures. In practical terms, on the level of participation, it can mean staying at work late if a rehearsal runs over or joining the choreographer for a brainstorming session in the pub after work to solve a staging issue.

It should be noted that alignment is not fixed, nor is it necessarily desirable. It can also be, as Wenger (1998:181) describes it, “an unquestioning allegiance that makes us vulnerable to all kinds of delusion and abuse”. Not everyone (not anyone?) will be happy to repeatedly stay at work, unpaid, after hours – after all, many dancers have already turned up to work early in order to warm up for the day. It is also typical for alignment to fluctuate during the process:

**RepD9** *It's this feeling of, ah, it's sometimes good that the day is over. [...] Sometimes we're happy that the day is over, [and] it's harder to start the day. Sometimes it was easy to go work and everybody stayed in the lunch break and everybody stayed after work.*

*TT But it's getting harder now.*

*RepD9 It's getting harder yeah. Which is okay, I think. [It] is my experience that these moments are coming [in choreographic processes].*

This leads me to the issue of non-participation as practice. We are all non-participants in various practices that can be quite distant from our lives, and these experiences of not being, say, a pilot, have fairly little influence on our identities. Where non-participation becomes of interest in terms of social order is within institutions and communities of practice.

Participation entails what Wenger (1998:56) calls “the possibility of mutual recognition”<sup>69</sup> (although not necessarily equality or respect) and is thus a source of identity, but not doing (or not wanting to do) something can be equally identity-defining. Wenger (1998:171) describes the tacitly shared understanding of workers looking forward to the end of the day or the weekend, of taking time during the day to discuss their private lives but also keeping work and the rest of their lives separate. Although they may try to hide these behaviours from the choreographer and at times even from each other, the dancers sometimes certainly wished that a tiring day would end sooner, or wanted to leave the close proximity of their colleagues behind for a time. Sometimes a dancer might in an interview or a private discussion somewhat defiantly declare to me that “it’s his piece”. This is also an instance of tacit non-participation: the dancer is setting him- or herself apart from the enterprise. Somehow the negotiation of meaning has left her/him less than convinced of the direction given by the choreographer. If this were a very strong feeling shared by many members of the community, it could perhaps lead to open non-participation as the communal

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<sup>69</sup> Recognising ourselves in each other.



response to the situation (see Wenger, 1998:80). It can also be seen as a manifestation of a “resistant self” and an example of “resistance through distance”, a covert way of opposing leadership through indifference (Collinson, 2006).

Wenger (1998:165-166) distinguishes two types of relationship between participation and non-participation: peripherality and marginality. Peripherality is “legitimate” non-participation of a kind typically allowed for trainees/apprentices/interns. They are on a learning trajectory towards full membership of the community of practice (the company or dance profession) and are therefore not yet expected to know and do everything that constitutes competent participation in that community, and are allowed mistakes.<sup>70</sup> I witnessed apprentices and interns taking part in the creation but not performing, as well as some who performed but were still mentored by other dancers – institutional practices vary.

If peripherality leads towards membership, marginality leads away from it. As opposed to allowed non-participation, marginality refers to preventing participation. My (non)-participation in classes and creation tasks with the dancers could perhaps be regarded as marginality: I did not have the competence required for full membership, nor had I tried to acquire full membership through established routes, and consequently had to step aside sooner rather than later. My marginality was expected and accepted, but marginalisation can also be more problematic, as when a supposedly full (or a peripheral) member of the community gets sidelined into a non-participant. A dancer may be taken off a task or even the piece;<sup>71</sup> her/his questions may go unanswered so that s/he is not able to produce the performance asked for; his/her ideas and suggestions

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<sup>70</sup> As full members of the community of apprentices, they may, however, be expected to do things such as take part in assessments and produce essays and reports on their learning.

<sup>71</sup> This did not happen in my case studies, but certainly the possibility of not getting work with the choreographer again is something that the dancers were aware of.

may be ignored; her/his weaknesses may be revealed and his/her strengths not used. I have here used the passive voice because it is possible for dancers to be marginalised by their colleagues/peers, but often the source of marginalisation is the “institution” and the choreographer as its representative. The power structures of belonging are complex, and the choreographer is in a key position to influence them. This is true both when the choreographer has cast the dancers s/he wants and when s/he has been contracted to create work for a group s/he has not chosen. A choreographer may choose to change dancers between different periods of working on the piece or to make the piece for fewer dancers. This is not to say that dancers are powerless with regard to the choreographer: communities always ultimately negotiate their own practice in the face of outside influence (Wenger, 1998:80).<sup>72</sup> When a choreographer asks the dancers to create something “together” and they end up struggling to figure out what that means (see Example 4), they are negotiating their communal response to this condition set by someone outside their group (which, incidentally, was precisely what the choreographer wanted, struggle and all).

Casting for a project is the starting point of a group that through negotiation of meaning grows into a local community of practice. Casting within a company – choosing to use one dancer but not another, giving more prominence to someone within a piece – also defines membership and identity. Wenger writes of membership:

When we are with a community of practice of which we are a full member, we are in familiar territory. We can handle ourselves competently. We experience competence and we are recognized as competent. We know how to engage with others. We understand why they do what they do because we understand the enterprise to which participants are accountable. Moreover, we share the resources they use to communicate and go about their activities.

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<sup>72</sup> See also 4.3: a leader’s power depends on followers’ cooperation, and a dancer could certainly make the process very much more difficult for the choreographer if s/he refused to cooperate partially or completely.

Explicitly or tacitly questioning someone's competence within a community of practice necessarily means questioning also their membership. The practice of a community defines what matters for the community, and "[b]eing included in what matters is a requirement for being engaged in a community's practice" (Wenger, 1998:74). It seems fair to say that being part of the performance matters in a dance company. Being denied that in some great or small way, whether through casting choices or simply because the choreographer did not have time to explore a particular dancer's full potential, must have an effect on the dancer's sense of belonging.

Casting within a piece – assigning tasks, moving dancers between sections, choosing soloists, setting who goes where – also creates patterns of participation within the company as dancers come to terms with what is expected of them and how to accomplish it. As an example, in one of the case studies a section was dropped and the dancers involved moved to another one, which they had to learn quickly from scratch. Dancers who already knew the section helped them out, and the new-comers actively sought their advice, turning to the people that they perhaps have closer relationships with, understand better, or who just happened to be close by. Everyone had to learn the section so they needed to carry each other a bit – which is not to say that there may not have been grudges, jealousy or frustration among them. A joint enterprise does not equal a harmonious process, although it can still be an effective one. Another example of shifting modes of participation was to be observed when a dancer was injured during the process and, although fully recovered by the time of the performance, ended up with a different role in the piece than might otherwise have been the case.

#### 4.5.3.3 Dancing in the margins?

I am aware of having so far focused on dancers in relation to choreographers, rather than dancers *and* choreographers. This is partly due to ratios – I observed two choreographers to about twenty dancers and apprentices – and partly the distinction inherent in the processes I observed: in both creative processes, the choreographer was to a significant extent the manager/leader/other, although there was an interesting shift in one case as the choreographer eventually took his place as one of the dancers in the piece. Both choreographers' actions and knowledge overlapped with and complemented those of the dancers (and each of the dancers were, of course, also different in their competences and specialisations), but the choreographers were also at the boundary of the dancers' community rather than full members of it, liaising with other production and management staff and, crucially, in a position of power over the dancers. There is an "us" and a "them".

I wonder if the despondency felt by dancers when someone (see reaction to McFee in chapter 1) tries to deny them the title of artist stems from a historical feeling of marginalisation. The problem of defining the roles of and relationships between dancers and choreographers seems to be one of identity in terms of competence (who is qualified to be regarded as and to regard herself as an artist/maker/creator/choreographer – the artist apparently enjoying higher status than the performer in this story). When interviewed on the topic of communication in the choreographic process, many of the dancers mentioned in passing the historically repressed status of the dancer in relation to the choreographer while also acknowledging that this is not necessarily *their* experience of working as dancers. It is, however, a part of their shared repertoire of meanings in the wider dance community

(not just the company they happen to work in at the moment). These shared stories certainly seemed to influence some dancers' ideas of how they should be participating when they suggested in interviews that they should perhaps speak up more often during the creative process.

Weick (1995:170) describes organisations as a combination of “the innovation of intersubjectivity” and “[g]eneric subjectivity [which] creates controlling structures in which people can substitute for one another”.<sup>73</sup> Developing intersubjectivity into general subjectivity through the interactions of “arguing, expecting, committing, and manipulating” is what makes the interchangeability of people possible; it creates the “arguments, expectations, justifications, and objects that become common premises for action” (Weick, 1995:170). Weick argues that organisations face constant pressure to create generic subjectivity both to enable interchangeability and for premise control.

Premise control, according to Jeffrey S. Harrison and Caron H. St John (2008:166), “involves periodically assessing the assumptions, or premises, underlying strategic choices”. Strategic choices in actual choreographic work as opposed to the management of a company (including a dance company) are naturally quite different in content but not necessarily in their aim, not to mention that a choreographer's job may well include or at least interact with aspects of management (scheduling, budget, contracts, marketing). The management of dance companies falls outside the scope of my observations, but there seems to be a need for a kind of premise control even in

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<sup>73</sup> The concepts of “inter-subjective” (interaction) and “generically subjective” (structure) come from Norbert Wiley's (1988) account of the levels theory of social reality, which also includes the “intra-subjective” level of the individual and the “extra-subjective” level of culture. In Wiley's (1988:258) words, “[i]ntersubjectivity is emergent upon the interchange and synthesis of two, or more, communicating selves” and implies a transformation in the individual, whereas “the defining feature of the structural level is that concrete human beings, subjects, are no longer present”. The generic self of social structure is “an interchangeable part – [a] filler of roles and follower of rules” (Wiley, 1988:258). Wiley includes organisations in this level of social structure.

studio work, inasmuch as it “helps organizations avoid situations in which their established strategies and goals are no longer appropriate” (Harrison & St John, 2008:166). The premises involved in choreographic work include fundamental questions about what the work is (about), an assumption – or a deliberate attempt to make no assumptions – about what is being made. An up-to-date, “good enough” mutual understanding of the premises of the piece enables the dancers to make appropriate offers and creative decisions at any given time during the process.

In my case studies, talks between the choreographer and dancers were a regular feature of the rehearsal process that served as a kind of premise control. These talks, even if sometimes time-consuming and not always conclusive, seemed to be regarded as a necessity. It is useful for the members of the process to share an understanding of the premises that their work is based on, and to be aware of changes to those premises. In this sense the dance companies studied seemed to orient towards generic subjectivity. It is therefore interesting to note that many of the dancers I spoke to during my research talked about the interchangeability of dancers as a necessary evil and a practice to be challenged. This seems to imply that not only is contemporary dance-making an intersubjective activity but also that general subjectivity cannot or should not be developed. At its extreme, by this logic dances could only exist if performed by the dancers that were involved in their creation. This is clearly not the case. Weick (1995:72) acknowledges that substitutions in organisations cannot be complete, that “[t]here is always some loss of joint understanding,” but he also notes that “not all losses are equally important for effective coordination of action” and that “simplification and filtering are necessary for people to coordinate in the first place”.

A dance will be different when performed by different dancers, but it can still be recognised as the same dance. Dancers' resistance to interchangeability is not a matter of a dance company not being able to cope with the inevitable loss of understanding brought about by a change in membership but, it seems, rather a political issue to do with the dancers' agency/empowerment or lack thereof, whether real or perceived.<sup>74</sup> The discourse of empowerment has existed for some time now, so something must be triggering it. Could it be that "employee resistance [is] a consequence of the contradictory forms of management control that treat workers as both disposable and dependable" (Collinson, 2005:1426)? Are dancers being treated as "both disposable and dependable" and is this causing resistance against hierarchical company structures?

If we accept Wiley's (1988) analysis of organisations as the realm of generic subjectivity and take into account dancers' reservations about their interchangeability, then perhaps we should study whether there is something in contemporary dance education and practice that generates and feeds a mistrust of organisation(s). Are dance educators encouraging an individualism that resists "filling roles" and "following rules," the enlightenment ideal of the artist as a unique individual? Do artists value collaboration as the ultimate meeting place for the uniqueness of individuals, the pinnacle of intersubjectivity? What is the impact of higher education dance programmes that prepare students to work as dancer-makers rather than dancers or makers? Perhaps quite simply the scarceness and unpredictability of their employment serves to make dancers jealous of the roles and jobs they have come to regard as theirs.

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<sup>74</sup> When "recreating" her work, choreographer Siobhan Davies has addressed this issue by inviting the dancers to go through the same process as the first dancers of that work, to bring their individuality to the dance and make the movement their own (Whatley, 2005:90-91).

This is not to say that dancers should not presume authorship over their work, but that questions of power and authorship in contemporary dance warrant ongoing discussion.

Chrysa Parkinson, for example, differentiates between authorship of movement and authorship of her experience of the movement as a performer:

I don't consider myself the author of the movement I create in other people's work because that movement is so deeply dependent on and intertwined in the environment I create it in. My authorship lies in my experience of the movement, not in the movement itself or even the role I have in the piece.

(Parkinson & Roos, 2013:89)

In the next section, I will probe deeper into the question of authorship by looking at choreographic processes as sites for negotiating meaning and making decisions, beginning with the meanings of 'sense' and how it is communicated.

#### *4.5.4 Sensing and deciding*

##### **4.5.4.1 Talking and doing**

The way dancers and dance-makers talk about their work reflects the inevitable interconnectedness of the different meanings of 'sense' in the choreographic process. When a dancer talks about communication as "clarification" (FreeD2), is she referring to clarity of meaning or clarity of feeling? Expressions such as "arriving with the other" and "to be in resonance with" something (FreeD2) suggest a workplace where sensing is a big part of making sense of situations and relationships. A dancer describes a choreographer giving directions:

*Then [the choreographer] showed what he meant and it was then suddenly – oh great, I can go for very light and free and airy quality and that made sense. (RepD8)*



The choreographer's verbal instructions were not enough. His labels for movement quality did not make sense to the dancer, but his visual demonstration did. Rather than use words to categorise movement qualities, it was more productive to refer to a perceptual category ("like this") that each could describe in their own words. The sense was in the sensing of the movement, not in how it was verbalised.

Another dancer talks about learning a tricky section:

*You just need to keep repeating it and now I'm starting to feel the connection throughout and weaving it together, because it was done in such a mathematical way. Now it's the body that has to link the route throughout ( ) make sense of it. (RepD11)*

Faced with the unfamiliarity of a complicated movement sequence, verbalising the task only gets the dancer so far. 'Sense' is physical familiarity with how the movement feels, and making sense of the movement requires repetition rather than conceptualisation.

This is a community of practice where the links between talking and doing, between verbal directions and agreements and their consequent physical actions, are far from straightforward.<sup>75</sup> If a dancer does not understand what the choreographer means or wants, she makes an offer instead: "I just find my own way to make sense of that part or journey or choreography" (FreeD4). Meanings are negotiated through action but actions, rather than meanings, are set.

*If I feel [the choreographer] leaves [the task] very open, then I just offer him something, and if he's not content with what I offer he will just say it. (RepD1)*

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<sup>75</sup> Note also social actions: for one dancer, the interesting thing about contemporary dance was the chance to set up different ways of working and staying "in tune with what happens in relation to what we have said" (FreeD2).

*In the end it made sense for me but I had to create a meaning for myself, I couldn't ask [for it], [the choreographer] wouldn't give it. (RepD5)*

The same reliance on action applies to the choreographer's job. The choreographer needs to "see what things resonate and make sense and what things can be scrapped" (PChor), using perception/feeling as a basis for decision-making. The making of a dance work could be described as a two-way sensemaking process between dancer(s) and choreographer(s) where the outcome, the "sense", has as many meanings and is experienced in as many ways as there are sensemakers. The commonality of choreography lies in the action.

I have above presumed a process where the choreographer is the primary decision-maker; if decision-making is shared, joint sensemaking takes on a different significance. A process may be built on "the idea that the right movement in this moment would not be subjective" (PChor). This kind of decision-making is based on the assumption that the dancers/dance-makers can reach a common perception of what feels "right" and a common understanding of *why* it is right: "there was this idea that we'll know it when we find it and we will all recognise that that is the right next thing to do" (PChor). Neither of the processes I observed were built on this kind of grabbing for common ground, but both featured discussions in which the dancers would highlight the problems they were having with making sense of the piece or finding the relevance of their actions at a particular moment.

The dancers' meanings typically remained subservient to the choreographer's vision, however:

*It's hard [for the dancer] to see the piece from the outside so it's hard to know what's relevant. We all have our very slightly different ideas of what the piece is so it's difficult to have a real opinion until the piece is more fully formed. (RepD3)*

These different ideas about the piece may in fact persist throughout the process. Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005:418) note that “[w]hen information is distributed among numerous parties, each with a different impression of what is happening, the cost of reconciling these disparate views is high”. Rather than make sure everyone has exactly the same idea of the piece it is possible for dancers to work interdependently, despite each having their own theory about what is going on and what action needs to be taken (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005:418).

#### 4.5.4.2 Problems, choices, decisions

According to behavioural scientist Martin S. Lindauer (2011:62), there are various problems with studying the psychology of artistic creativity as problem solving:

who sets the problem, the individual or external circumstances? A problem may arise when an artist wants to do something different from earlier work or because she is competing with another artist. Further, what happens when there is no problem to be solved, as when a creative person is just ‘fooling (or playing) around,’ enjoying himself, curious, or simply lucky? Also, how account for spontaneous solutions to unexpressed problems?

Aesthetic arguments cannot always be settled (Lyas, 1997:128), and there seems to be a clear understanding of this among dance-makers when, perhaps after a disagreement, dancers declare that the piece ultimately belongs to the choreographer, or when they describe their job as helping the choreographer to fulfil his vision. Philosopher Colin Lyas (1997:129) suggests that aesthetic judgements may be right or wrong, but they are not so universally and across time. To make the best possible piece requires a preliminary agreement about whose best we are talking about. It might be the group collectively or it might be the choreographer. It might even be the dancers if they have commissioned the choreographer to create a piece for them – something that one of my interviewed choreographers had experienced.

With the caveat that “problem” and “decision” are somewhat nebulous concepts in choreographic processes, they nevertheless happen on various levels throughout the choreographic process. One of the choreographers emphasised the dancers’ responsibility as performers to solve problems in real time – to deal together with the sometimes unexpected circumstances that the piece may throw at them in performance. Problems during the making of a piece range from general (e.g. how to make the dramaturgy of the piece work) to specific (e.g. how to make a lift safe/comfortable/visually effective, or even whether to include it at all) and require decisions to be made. The interviews highlighted two aspects of those decisions: that they are made under time pressure and that the title of ‘choreographer’ implies power and responsibility to make decisions. Having a designated decision-maker who has limited time to make decisions are common features of organisations, but when choreographers make artistic or even practical decisions, they are not typically engaging in cost avoidance, benefit seeking or probability estimates in the manner of large-scale organisations (see Tallman & Gray, 1990:428). I will mainly treat choreographic problem-solving and decision-making as a kind of sensemaking, a process of “talking into being” that leads to action, which in turns leads to more communication and further action, cyclically and with considerable overlap between what is “communication” and what is “action”.

In a sociological context, Tallman and Gray (1990:423) use the word “decision” for actions (selections) that are deliberate and required in “nonroutine situations under conditions of risk or uncertainty” – a definition that echoes descriptions of sensemaking above. This is to differentiate “decisions” from “choices”, which can be

conscious or unconscious and are related to routine selection processes.<sup>76</sup> Problems are defined as situations in which there are obstacles to reaching a goal but no certainty about how to overcome the obstacle or of the results of any attempt to do so (Tallman & Gray, 1990:423); again, the uncertainty suggests a connection with sensemaking. Tallman and Gray note that sociologists often use the concepts of decision-making and problem-solving interchangeably but also point out that not all decisions involve solving a problem. Problem-solving, however, “implies a process driven by a related series of decisions” including but not limited to

(a) the decision as to whether to commit oneself to attempt to solve the problem, (b) the decision to search for problem solutions, (c) the decision to take a particular course of action, (d) the evaluation of the outcome and the decision as to whether to stop the process, continue with the same effort, or search for alternative avenues for solving the problem.

(Tallman & Gray, 1990:424)

A choreographic process can be conceived of as a succession of decisions, some of which are quickly replaced by other decisions and some of which will hold true for the rest of the process. As was mentioned in 4.3.3, a decision is a starting point for the next one and has to be made so that the process can move forward. One kind of problem that occurred in the case studies was that a choreographer had in mind a certain image he wanted to create on stage. Is it likely to work, should time be spent on trying to create it? What could the image consist of? Can the dancers perform the necessary components? How can their task be made feasible? Does the created image serve its purpose in the piece?

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<sup>76</sup> According to Hargadon and Bechky (2006:487), the purpose of some organisations is finding creative new solutions to the point that “arriving at a creative solution was not a deviation from expected routine but rather *was* the expected routine” (emphasis original).

As these questions suggest, a decision is a kind of “commitment to future action” (Huisman, 2001:70). Once a decision has been made, it can be tested – for example to see how two separately made phrases can be performed at the same time – and used as the basis for other decisions. The decision to plot two phrases together may lead to further decisions about timing and spacing. A less than optimal decision can sometimes be overturned, or new decisions made to adapt to circumstances that cannot be changed: a dancer might for instance ask the choreographer if a transition can be changed to make it more logical for her.

One of the case studies involved an elaborate set that was not as solid to dance on as first thought and decisions about safety rules had to be made and revised in conversations involving the whole group. While the process involved some testing and calculations, there was no way of knowing exactly what loads would be safe. The event is in line with Weick’s (1995:55) assertion that sensemaking is “driven by plausibility rather than accuracy”. Decisions are not typically based on hard evidence; instead

[a]ctions enable people to assess causal beliefs that subsequently lead to new actions undertaken to test the newly asserted relationships. Over time, as supporting evidence mounts, significant changes in beliefs and actions evolve.

(Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005:416)

At first, the structure was deemed safe to dance on. When a part of it broke under a dancer, its strength was tested and new rules for how it could be used were established based on new estimates of the forces it could take. As Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005:415) point out, rational decision-making based on accurate information is beyond the capabilities of most real-world organisations, which have to identify problems “from an amorphous stream of experience” before they can be addressed.

According to communication scholars Randy Hirokawa and Marshall Scott Poole (1996), communication has both an instrumental and a constitutive role in group decision making. In the instrumental view, communication is the medium through which various factors such as group size and members' knowledge influence decisions, but communication is also how decisions come into being: the making of a group decision can be detected in the questions, arguments, suggestions and announcements that not only influence the decision but, in a sense, are the decision. Hirokawa and Poole (1996:8) suggest thinking of decisions as “emerging texts or developing ideas” which seems appropriate for choreography – a dance work emerging from a chain of decisions. That chain may be quite tangled and broken, though, because of the ambiguous nature of decision making.

While some situations may allow us to recognise very clearly the steps taken towards a decision and when it was reached, most of the time decisions exist in a complex network of dependencies, each decision consisting of smaller choices and forming a part of bigger contingencies. To give a simple example of those dependencies, changing the front (angle relative to the audience) of a particular sequence gave it a different appearance in the piece but also meant that each dancer had to find new reference points in the space and reconstruct their routes through the section. The same section went through several transformations as layers were added: changes in the movement sequence, changes in timing and directions, added movement across the space and in time with music. Ideas keep developing but it is difficult to say where they started or when they are finished, as demonstrated by the difficulties one faces trying to trace a “finished” choreography change by change back to its origins.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, as Hirokawa and Poole (1996:15) observe, “decision quality [...] is difficult to measure for tasks that do not have a correct answer, which includes the majority of real-world tasks”.

#### 4.5.4.3 Embodied sensemaking

While there are similarities between decision-making and sensemaking, a decision-making approach to choreography seems to prioritise the role of the choreographer (cf. 4.3) while the concept of sensemaking lends itself better to analysing the dancer's role in making work. Although Cecilia Roos (2013) does not talk explicitly about sensemaking, to me that is what her research into the professional dancer's experience of and activities during a creative process is about:

Even if a movement can look quite the same, almost identical, when performed by several dancers each dancer's description and experience of it can be completely different. The difference in the experience of first seeing a movement, then studying it in order to finally perform it is what I am, and have been, busy with in my research. [...] *How does the understanding of a movement material shift through the actual doing?*<sup>78</sup>

(Roos, 2013:12; emphasis added)

The dancer's work consists of making sense of movement perceptually and physically. The movement, or the task to create movement, is perceived through the senses; the dancer then feels her/his way through the task and/or movement material until some kind of understanding is reached. This process is both individual and collaborative: while the choreographer is both the instigator of the process and may suggest imagery to influence the dancer's interpretation, the dancer is free to arrive at his/her own understanding, to make his/her own sense out of the movement, "[a]s long as the result

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<sup>78</sup> That a movement is, in this description, first seen, then studied and finally performed suggests that Roos is referring to a choreographic process where movement is given to the dancer to interpret rather than one where she is wholly or partially creating the movement. Roos (2013:21, 19) does, however, elaborate on the different ways that movement material – "the starting point of [her] discussion" – can be arrived at in contemporary choreographic processes, from learning repertoire to improvising within a given framework, and argues that in any case "the dancer is not a passive recipient: she is driven, proactive and co-creating". She also points out that "the dancer of today" sees "the testing and the experimentation as a natural part of the work [...] not just something that is expected of her, but it is above all what she expects and wants". The freelance dancer is interested in "the process and the becoming" rather than in learning someone else's already existing role in a piece. (Roos, 2013:16-17)



is in line with the choreographer's idea" (Roos, 2013:22). Parkinson describes this in terms of the how and what of dancing:

How I dance is a by-product of my various trainings, my physicality and my cultural background. What I dance is a formal contract that I enter when I accept the role of dancer in a piece. I do whatever it takes to dance whatever is proposed for me to dance – to the best of my abilities. My method for getting that done is personal, authored by me; in service of the action I'm taking in my role as a performer.

(Parkinson & Roos, 2013:94-95)

Regardless of her/his role as a creator and/or interpreter of the movement material, the dancer is an active agent in the process, constantly making choices in her/his relationship to the movement ("creating, feeling, recognizing, learning, driving, deepening, absorbing or relating to") (Roos, 2013:22-23). S/he has to negotiate between the what and the how, the collective and the individual, to make sense of the circumstances in relation to his/her earlier experiences.

*It's the choreographer who has the responsibility for the movement phrase but it's my responsibility to interpret, and to interpret it in a qualified way. (RepD8)*

*There is nothing typical about choreographers. They have all a completely different vision and personality and taste and what is art. [...] Some people have it all fixed and they come with it and it's very fast and superefficient, and some others, they have nothing, and they just develop it with the dancers and dancers are more involved as creators. And then [there] are others that come with very inconcrete ideas, maybe a story or something like that [...] (RepD8)*

The dancer's job is to perform the movement material, whether created by the choreographer, improvised, or generated through tasks. Parkinson and Roos (2013:78) define movement material as

movement that can be articulated, repeated, communicated and manipulated clearly enough that it can become choreographic content. It can include qualitative states that produce recognizably consistent movement, phrases of movement (several movements put together), or single movements (steps).

As useful as it is to have a definition for the concept, it is not obvious what kind of movement can be articulated “clearly enough” and what is required of movement for it to become “choreographic content”. What does seem clear is that there is a progression from “material” to “choreography”. While material comes from what Parkinson and Roos (2013:78) call “procedures”,<sup>79</sup> choreography comes from making sense of the material. This is the refining process that can sometimes suffer from lack of time (see 4.1.4). Parkinson (Parkinson & Roos, 2013:81) also wonders what is the “raw material of a phrase of movement” (“maybe the person making it”), which suggests that the boundaries are anything but clear. But does it matter what the different stages of movement/choreography are called as long as some understanding – an end-result, a choreography – is achieved? “Language is very useful in physical processes for its ability to make distinctions between things. Movement is useful for it’s [sic] ability to humble and question those distinctions,” Parkinson and Roos write (2013:103) in a statement that echoes the distinction between sense as signification and a felt or embodied sense.

Perhaps the most important tool dancers have for making sense of their work is the relentless repetition, refining and further repetition that starts with the first tasks of the process and continues all the way to performance after performance of the same movements or movement qualities.<sup>80</sup> According to Liz Lerman, repetition allows dancers to perform moves confidently (2014:34). A lifetime (a career’s worth) of repetition is also inscribed in the dancers memory of movement as schema-like patterns:

Repetition is essential in a dancer’s work process; it is protective and inevitable due to the limitations of any one body. Patterns become part of the

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<sup>79</sup> Translating e.g. musical scores, pedestrian movements, text and tasks into movement.

<sup>80</sup> Improvised performances are a separate issue that my case studies did not cover.

infrastructure of our bodies, and they integrate themselves into how we see, hear and feel. [...] We can't deny these patterns, but we can detail them, elaborate them, diminish or expand them. It is exactly through this paradoxical process of accumulating patterns and reforming them that we can arrive at new ways of making sense. The craft of adaptation is plastic: a practice of both giving and taking form.

(Parkinson & Roos, 2013:83)

The dancer's repetition of movement material is also a sensory experience for the choreographer, who, as has been mentioned on several occasions, depends on the dancer for the information he or she needs to make artistic decisions, and for carrying out those decisions.

## **5. Discussion and conclusion**

### **5.1 Summary of findings**

I have defined a choreographic process as a social and artistic decision-making process, consisting of and organised in interaction between dancers and choreographers. As a work environment, contemporary dance companies are characterised by face-to-face interaction that is embodied and multimodal, with movement as one of its key modalities. Taking into account the communicative power of silence and silent actions is crucial to understanding the dancer's agency in dance-making. Dancers also form a community of practice that can wield subversive power in the process, and a choreographer's ability to lead the process depends on the dancers' willingness to cooperate. The most important aspects of the choreographer's leadership from the followers' perspective are providing the company with a compelling vision for the process and nurturing trust and respect in the work community.

A choreographer can be defined as the person who has the institutional power to make and announce decisions in the process and collaboration as a mode of working that involves shared decision-making. Contemporary choreography typically involves movement material created by the dancers during the process, but I would argue that this does not make it an inherently collaborative practice. Choreography may even be one of few workplaces where benign dictatorship is not only tolerated but occasionally even desirable.

I have argued that regarding contemporary choreographic processes as organisational behaviour can illuminate and perhaps even relieve some of the ethical issues

surrounding dancer-choreographer relationships by managing expectations and clarifying terminology around concepts such as agency and collaboration. Making sense of dance-making requires a good grasp of interactional modalities and communicative competence. Dance-making is a reiterative process that alternates at varying frequencies between talking and doing. It is punctuated by decisions made by the choreographer and relies on repeated sensory experiences for its substance and cooperative interpersonal relationships for its organisation.

## 5.2 The authorship of experience: a discussion of dance as work

The relation between choreographer and dancer is a difficult one, fraught with questions of control, ownership and collaboration. Dance has been trying to challenge these hierarchies since Judson Church, but it seems the dilemmas don't go away.

At times of stress in rehearsal it becomes easy for us to adopt habitual positions which reinforce negative hierarchies. The choreographer slips easily into the role of controlling teacher and the dancer assumes the passive resistance of the student, each triggering the other in a cycle which can be hard to break.

(Burrows, 2010:204)

Writer after writer from Van Dyke (1992) to Burrows (2010) above has called the relationship between dancers and choreographers a difficult one, usually pointing out misuse of power, and problems of ownership and collaboration. At the same time some organisational researchers are finding in dance a method for improving leader-follower relationships (e.g. Springborg & Sutherland, 2016). Before suggesting directions for further study, I will discuss my exploration into the organisation of choreography in the context of hierarchies and authorship of dance pieces, choreographic processes and personal experiences.

An ideal of democracy, of overturning traditional hierarchies and authorship in favour of equality and empowerment within processes and in relation to the audience, has been a part of contemporary dance discourse at least since the 1960s, and has had a huge influence on how choreography is understood and conducted today (Kolb, 2013). We can see the repercussions in the studio, where dancers often create the material they dance – as a case in point, the choreographer did not prepare any movement material for the Repertory Work but instead gave the dancers tasks to generate movement and edited the results. The prevailing values of the contemporary dance community include “collective authorship within a democratic community, attention to process, exchange, or dialogue, and an aesthetic that embraces imperfection and reflects human fallibility” (Kloppenber, 2010:184). As we already heard from one of the dancers,

*I think what interests me now [...] is more the process than actually the type of work or the result of it. It's more like what can I learn during the process. (RepD4)*

This dancer's interest in her individual personal/professional development may be part of a wider current phenomenon. While collectivity was an essential tool for the empowerment of (female) artists in the 1970s, collective structures and individual empowerment were not always easily compatible (Claid, 2006:131).<sup>81</sup> According to Claid (2006:131), “discovering female subjectivity in a patriarchal society” was the feminist challenge of the previous century; now it is time to focus on “nurturing the voice of each individual within the group”. The idea of individual genius, abandoned in the wave of collectivity, can be redeployed “as different, individual expressions of

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<sup>81</sup> See Claid (2006:11-13, 130-133) for an account of her experiences with the X6 Dance Space collective of artists.

creativity that depend on, surpass and return to the group consciousness” (Claid, 2006:131).

Despite her emphasis on nurturing individual creativity, Claid’s social model above revolves around a “group consciousness”. What artists Peter Dunn and Loraine Leeson (1997:26) call “good social aesthetics” in art have come to mean collaborative methods and shared decision-making in contemporary dance – participatory practices not only regarding audiences but also between artists. This social aesthetic manifests itself as regular discussions in the studio, observable in both case studies. Having witnessed many of these conversations in and outside the studio I certainly cannot agree with Wulff’s (1998:6) assessment of dancers as “not very verbal people”.<sup>82</sup> In any social situation some people are more verbally active than others, and in choreographic processes the dancers’ activities tend to allow for fewer verbal contributions than are available to the choreographer, but when the situation calls for it, they readily offer and discuss their opinions.

Contemporary dance-makers are concerned with the ethicality of their practice, and many see egalitarianism as a way to achieve a valued social aesthetic ideal. It should be noted, however, that “good” social aesthetics are not necessary for “good” aesthetics in art, even though they may influence our perceptions of beauty (Dunn & Leeson, 1997).<sup>83</sup> That is to say, an audience member may find the work aesthetically powerful whether or not the work or its mode of production are in accordance with her ethical views. Kolb (2013) argues that the once transgressive developments towards participation and cooperation in the social politics of dance have since become a

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<sup>82</sup> Admittedly, Wulff is referring to ballet rather than contemporary dancers, and perhaps there is a difference in communicative behaviour between the two genres.

<sup>83</sup> Dunn and Leeson (1997: 26) suggest that “beauty is a fusion of good social and artistic aesthetics”.

mainstay of the current experience economy and can no longer be used to demonstrate the innovativeness or social progressiveness of choreography. Furthermore, she sees the current interest in the social aesthetics of dance as a kind of return to earlier ideals:

Such concepts as harmony and integrity, having been abandoned as ideal properties of the traditional “beautiful” artwork, are being reintroduced through the back door as features of the social process of creation, or qualities of the participants.

(Kolb, 2013:45)

In other words, while the value of the art work, the product, is no longer judged by exacting standards of beauty, the process of making it is increasingly expected to conform to certain social aesthetics or ethical ideals.<sup>84</sup> Socially “beautiful” processes are expected to result in compelling work. The same idea, quoted previously in 4.1.3, was expressed by one of the interviewees with “communication” standing in for good social aesthetics:

*There needs to be communication in the studio. Open communication is vital because we need to understand each other, and if we are able to communicate well as a group we’re able to better communicate outwardly, in my opinion. Dance is an art form that needs to communicate. I’m not defining what it needs to communicate but somehow the heart and soul of what we do is to communicate, and like I say, it has to happen from the ground up. (RDir)*

Of course few artists would expect working together to be always harmonious, no matter how much communication there is – it can be quite the opposite, and creative tension can be part of what attracts people to work together. What is important is that dance-making processes seem to be judged by ethical-aesthetic values, sometimes with the implication that an aesthetically valuable creation process translates to an aesthetically compelling experience for the audience. Such a connection is elusive at

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<sup>84</sup> Kolb (2013) also discusses immersive performances and audience participation in terms of experience economics. This topic falls outside the scope of my research, but offers further ethical dilemmas of power, agency and autonomy.



best, and any perceived correlation between the nature of the interaction during a creative process and the quality or aesthetic value of the product of that process seems likely to be incidental and highly subjective. Even if we can reconcile the idea that good communication in the studio breeds good performances on stage with thinking that some strife is necessary in a process (perhaps good communication includes some conflict), we still lack ways to objectively assess the aesthetic value of art or artistic processes. Moreover, we are left with an ethical dilemma: does a good outcome justify a process that may be so difficult as to be traumatic for the dancers.

How choreographers fulfil their role as decision-makers and visionaries – as leaders – has a huge impact on the process and – even if it is very difficult to quantify – the resulting work. Problem-solving and decision-making are goal-driven activities (Tallman & Gray, 1990), and the choreographer tends to be the person who sets the goals of a choreographic process. Financial or critical success does not provide a straightforward measure of success for the outcomes of choreographic processes, but we can ask whether the choreographer is satisfied with the work. We can also ask for the performers' artistic opinion of their experience of performing the piece. Furthermore, we can ask all participants whether the process was conducted in an ethical manner and efficiently considering the circumstances (including the participants' skills and commitment, the organisational framework, the time available, etc.) and whether it was a success from the point of view of job satisfaction and the goals of the participating individuals, the goals of the group and the goals of the organisation(s) involved.

All this is not to say that the process has no impact on how the work is received. Dudek (2011:55) sums up cognitive, perceptual and information processing-based theories of aesthetics as follows:

Aesthetic experiencing is [...] colored by sources of information about art, by individual habits of information processing, by affect, by past experience, by personal values and prejudices associated with class status, by information about prototypical categories (such as structural properties, subject matter, and constantly evolving artistic forms), and by cognitive structures that provide bases for perceiving the object.

As an audience member my aesthetic experience of the two case study productions was certainly coloured by what I knew and how I felt about how the work had been made, and about the people performing it. Similarly any other audience member's experience might be influenced by what they have learnt about the process through pre-publicity – newspaper articles, programme leaflets, artist meetings – or through knowing someone involved in the process or having been involved in it themselves. Nevertheless, the process as such can only influence audience perceptions inasmuch as it becomes a part of their field of experience.

My two case studies provide examples of different approaches to the relationship between process and product. In the Repertory Production, the choreographer's focus was firmly on the process in that he designed it to give them experiences that should help them achieve a flow-like state of mind when performing. He encouraged the dancers to focus on fully experiencing their paths through the piece and not to worry about the audience:

**VChor** ((*talking to the dancers*)) *You just need to be that experience to create that experience. For me if you push it, you are creating kind of like a (.) a caricature, so the audience get the caricature, not the experience. So don't worry about them, I worry about them.*

The choreographer is adopting a role that Annie Kloppenberg (2010:198) would perhaps call “post-control”: he creates “a total experience” that allows the dancers to take part in shaping their involvement in the piece, which in turn can “invite audiences to author their own understandings as they encounter a work”. The social ideal of agency, of authoring one’s own experience, is extended to the audience. In a way, the process is the product.

The Freelance Production, on the other hand, was geared towards creating a piece that could communicate particular things to the audience. The choreographer had a story that he felt made sense to be told physically, and the choreographic process was a continuation of his research into the best ways to tell it:

*I think what I was looking at with the work was how do I, through some physical tasks or physical material evoke in the audience something that they might have experienced physically or might have a sense of in their own body. (PChor)*

He had already tested some of his ideas with other dancers and made some material. When a dancer asked him if he was going to use that material in the piece, he suggested that it was research and that he wanted to go through the process again with the dancers that would be performing the work:

**PChor** *I think— I mean I saw last week as being like: which of these tasks that I have in my book have legs, which ones are worth kind of going with. Um. And I think they all are. But I don’t want- I wanna give you guys a process as well, (you know what I) mean like I want to (.) take you through that.*

In the end, he did use some of the phrases he had worked on with other dancers as part of the material. It is interesting that the choreographer describes the process as an experience that he “gives” to the dancers and through which he takes them. This is a choreographer very much in control of the product and the process by which it is made. Of course the dancers will have *a* process regardless of whether the choreographer

gives them one, but his phrasing implies that the dancers should have – and perhaps expect to have – a certain kind of *experience* of the process. The process itself remains subservient to the product.

Contemporary dance can be a troublesome mix of ethics and aesthetics as a work environment. Parkinson defends the right of the dancer to “produce roles and relationships, not pieces” (Parkinson & Roos, 2013:85) – in other words to *not* aspire to shared authorship with the choreographer. She is careful to acknowledge the problem of the dancer being treated as an object (used as an instrument) but insists that this is not how she experiences her role as a dancer. Rather, she has authorship of her interpretation of movement, of her expression, of her subjective experience as a performer:

I know there’s something inherently uncomfortable about the idea of objectifying oneself – becoming an object has a history of violence and disrespect to it, and I understand the desire to avoid that connotation. But objectifying my experience is not the same thing as becoming an object, nor is it the same as objectifying myself. I’m interested in subjective experience as an aspect of my authorship as a performer.

(Parkinson & Roos, 2013:90).

This discussion is illustrative of the weight of perceived oppression in choreographic practices and one of the reasons why I believe it is useful to reach beyond dance studies for different ways to conceptualise work relationships in dance. In very simple terms, it is sometimes fine, and perhaps even enjoyable, to be told what to do, as a choreographer described his experiences as a dancer:

*Most people don’t work in a way of like ‘here’s the steps, I’m gonna teach you a load of steps’. Some people do, you know, I’ve certainly worked like that and I’ve kind of found it quite refreshing. ((laughter))* (PChor)

The authorship of experience, whether one's own or that of other people, appears to be one of the core characteristics of contemporary choreography. The need to create engaging processes seems to have a direct connection to the employment of improvisation as a choreographic method (Kloppenber, 2010) and task-based choreography in general. Kloppenber (2010:189) defines "post-control" choreography as:

a process in which choreographers work collaboratively with dancers to generate fixed choreography out of improvisational explorations. It is a dialogical process, a modulated, deliberate transfer of control from choreographer to dancer that relies on the moments in which choreographers loosen their grip on the whole, give dancers agency and freedom, allow a piece to develop its own identity, and become audience to their own work-in-process.

Yet the choreographers only "loosen their grip" for moments. They are the ones giving dancers freedom and allowing a piece to develop, but can presumably then also take that freedom away and go back to being in control. I have argued, instead, that agency is not something that choreographers give to dancers or that dancers cannot have without choreographers giving up some of theirs. As was discussed in chapters 4.2 and 4.5, choreography, "the writing of dances", is not the only source of agency in a choreographic process. The dancer's agency should not be defined in terms of her ability to do the choreographer's job, nor should the choreographer's control be understood as absolute. There are no leaders without followers who accept their leadership.

Current organisational research is interested in "distributed and dispersed leadership and empowered and exemplary followership" (Collinson, 2006:187),<sup>85</sup> and clearly so

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<sup>85</sup> Collinson (2006:183) names integrity, honesty and credibility as examples of qualities of exemplary followership.

are many contemporary dance-makers. Lerman (2014:34) describes her role as a choreographer as that of creating an environment that enables dancers to “make their best work”, which for Lerman is typically not movement made by her but made by the dancers themselves. Lerman found that engaging dancers in the creation of material makes them more invested in performing it, but that she then needed to approach the material in a different way from her own. Feedback – giving and receiving notes – needed qualities of non-defensiveness, inquisitiveness and respect, creating an environment where dancers can do their best work.<sup>86</sup> I understand her approach as one of respectful, follower-centric leadership. Lerman finds that dancers perform better when they perform their own material, and because she wants to enable them to do their job as well as possible, she creates a process where they can do that. It is perhaps only a difference in language, but to me a significant one: the leader responding to the followers’ needs in order to make better work, or the leader stepping aside to let the work take care of itself. Studies in organisational management suggest a positive correlation between the ethical treatment of employees and increased productivity. We can see that the ethical treatment of dancers has the potential to increase their job satisfaction. Can we assume that this results in a more productive choreographic process, whatever that means?

Lerman describes her company as full of workers “*who are able to function both with decisive autonomy and collaborative flexibility*” (2014:37, emphasis original). These appear to be desirable qualities in any workforce in a society characterised by the prevalence of knowledge work. Leaders are managers of meaning for driven professionals, careers are increasingly varied and changeable, flexibility is a necessity

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<sup>86</sup> Lerman has formulated these values into the Critical Response Process, a tool for discussing artistic works-in-progress constructively.

and entrepreneurial attitude a definite advantage. As Kolb (2013) points out, contemporary work environments have a great deal in common with contemporary dance as a work environment. Social capital, in particular, is central to both. No wonder, then, that organisational studies have developed an interest in artistic practices, as demonstrated by the relatively recent interest in organisational aesthetics (see 2.8).

Looking at dance and organisation from the opposite angle, as I have done here, may be a more foreign idea. Dance work is not *supposed* to be like other work – we think of it as a calling, perhaps a privilege and a (poorly paid, all-consuming) curse – but in some respects it may hold a mirror up to society unwittingly rather than, say, ironically or critically. If dance reflects the society and culture around it, so do its working practices. Leadership research has suggested that if leaders are held accountable for the outcomes of their decision-making rather than the process of decision-making, they are more likely to take risks and behave unethically (Burke et al., 2007:618). If choreographers have been mainly accountable for the work they put on stage and not how it was made, this may in part explain the longstanding perceptions of dancers being at risk of unethical treatment by choreographers.

### 5.3 Future research

This research could be extended in various directions, in terms of both methodology and subject matter. The first of these is something that I was originally hoping to include in my fieldwork but that did not readily fit into the framework of the current research: a practice-based approach with the researcher as a participant in and/or an organiser of choreographic processes. Practice-based research would greatly increase

the ethnographer's opportunities of participating in the activities that she is observing. Acting as a choreographer, a researcher would be better positioned to investigate different kinds of creative tasks and methodologies as well as consciously manipulate the parameters of communication, for example by enforcing particular modalities and restricting others to see how each one is used. She would also be able to experience choreographic decision-making at first hand.

As a dancer in a process led by someone else, the researcher could explore the contributions available to her/him and learn more about the rules of membership and participation in the community of practice. While I was conducting this research I had the opportunity to take part in a workshop, led by a contemporary choreographer, that explored the themes and methods he was using to make new work. I was a dancer, albeit briefly and without the pressure of performing the work, in a creative process, and started to recognise connections between what I was experiencing and what I had observed. This first-hand experience convinced me that the felt meanings (Hansen et al., 2007) of choreographic practices could be further investigated through more immersive researcher participation and/or practice-as-research.

Learning a phrase, for instance, can seem like a fairly straightforward, goal-oriented process when observed from the outside, but reveals itself as a complex series of interactions. Learning a phrase while it is being created is even more of a sensory challenge. To give an example, in the workshop we were briefly divided into two quartets. The choreographer created movement on one group of dancers while the other group, myself included, tried to learn the material he was creating. This meant waiting while the choreographer tried different things, trying to spot when a decision was made to keep something, then learning one's role in the new bit as quickly as



possible and figuring out connections with the other dancers while paying attention to what was being created next. Of course our pressure to learn was much less than it would be for actual performers, but the experience reminded me of similar situations in the case studies, where the secondary learners needed to communicate very actively with the primary ones, with each other and with the choreographer to make sure they were reaching the constantly moving goalposts.

It was also illuminating to experience the effect that a morning class with the choreographer had on the dancing that followed. Having warmed up in the choreographer's movement style, we had a certain familiarity with the workshop material. This felt like confirmation of what I observed during the second case study, when mornings began with a class led by the choreographer: the class guided the dancers towards the choreographer's movement style, and this effect continued throughout the day, even when they were producing the movement material themselves.<sup>87</sup>

While my research focuses on communication between dancers and choreographers, it is also important to acknowledge that a rehearsal director can have a significant role in how communication is carried out in the studio. Furthermore, the artistic management of a company may also influence the daily work in the studio either directly or indirectly, and technical staff, musicians, marketing professionals, photographers etc., all play a part in the creative process and the communication around it. In short, a choreographic process takes place in a wider organisational context than could be described in this thesis, and the management models of different

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<sup>87</sup> A morning class, even if not taken by the choreographer, also gives the group an opportunity to bond: they are sharing an experience that gives them a similar mental and physical readiness to work together on the other tasks of the day. Without a class the dancers warm up on their own, which can take them to a different kind of state than that needed by the choreographer and certainly different from each other.

dance companies could well be worth reviewing for a better understanding of the power dynamics that influence decision-making in choreographic processes. It would also be interesting to compare organisational characteristics across genres and in a wider variety of companies and productions.

Encouraged by the results of my conversation analytic experiments, I also believe that zooming in further on the specific characteristics of embodied interaction in choreographic processes could tell us more about the communicative competence required of dance professionals. This kind of knowledge could have implications for professional dance training. A conversation analytic approach would require arranging recordings of rehearsals specifically with the goal of capturing as much behavioural detail as possible, and would mean limiting to some extent the actions of the participants. Background music, for instance, complicates the task of transcription significantly, and it could be necessary to ask participants to face towards cameras in situations where they would normally choose their orientation freely. Whether such recordings would still be of “naturally occurring talk” (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008) can be questioned, and there are various technical obstacles to overcome, but I believe this is an avenue that with careful planning could produce unique data.

A very different but equally interesting direction is that of dance philosophy. Collaborative approaches to choreography and attitudes to authorship could be explored further through the philosophical concept of collective intentionality: “the power of minds to be jointly directed at objects, matters of fact, states of affairs, goals, or values” (Schweikard & Schmid, 2013:n.p.). The participants described some of their past experiences of choreographic processes in a way that evokes ideas of shared intentionality, joint action and group agency, but the leap from individuals’ intentions

to collective action and responsibility is not simple in either practical or philosophical terms. Philosopher Deborah Tollefsen and psychologist Rick Dale (2012:385, 403) suggest combining an analysis of “low-level” cognitive phenomena (e.g. processes of alignment) with an account of “high-level” states such as “goals, commitments, and intentions” to provide “a dynamic account of joint activity”. Tollefsen and Dale’s theory could provide a way to approach the interaction between dancers *as they are dancing*:

The ballet troupe’s higher-order we-intentions will inform their lower level processes and explains how their perceptual and motor systems can function together to achieve their goal. Similarly, the presence of an alignment system explains how we-intentions can be formed on the fly, so to speak, without prior planning or agreements.<sup>88</sup>

(Tollefsen & Dale, 2012:398)

“We-intention” is a comfortably non-gender-specific term, whereas throughout the writing of this thesis I have, despite not researching gender as such, struggled with my choice of gendered pronouns to represent dancers and choreographers. Dance historian Ann Daly (1998) has written about her need to find a gender-based theoretical framework that would afford women dancers and choreographers agency while accepting that their choices were and are restricted by social and institutional conditions. Daly wishes to free (female) dance scholars from the marginalisation that comes with being associated with non-verbal culture and thus a “feminine” field study. Susan W. Stinson (1998:119-120) regards issues of passivity and obedience in dance education as primarily concerning girls and young women who are taught “silent conformity”, to be “good girls” – a role that can turn into a kind of escapism from the “risks and responsibilities of power”.

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<sup>88</sup> Scholars differ in their exact definitions of we-intentionality; simply put, some kind of intention to act as a group is required.

I see this feminist concern reflected in the present-day discourse surrounding the dancer's agency even though it is not necessarily expressed in terms of gender. When I presented some of this research at the 12th NOFOD conference in Iceland,<sup>89</sup> the topic of peripheral and marginal participation in choreographic processes (see 4.5.3) sparked a conversation on the invisibility of women dancers in dance history. Participation was instantly read as gendered, a point of view probably unintentionally promoted by the fact that my case studies featured male choreographers and that I used female pronouns when referring to dancers in my presentation. While I agree that gender affects participation, I hope to have shown that it is not the only lens through which we can and should analyse dance-making. Daly (1998) draws attention to the importance of noting other social factors – race, class, sexuality, education, etc. – in connection to gender. I want to emphasise that the wider social, political and cultural context influences dance companies as organisations and therefore the patterns of participation within them. Some of these influences are of course gendered, and theories of organisational behaviour could be combined with a gendered approach to theorising about dance-making in order to reveal more about the role that gender plays in dance companies.

Finally, I wonder if a different approach to ethnography could help make mine and other similar research more relevant and accessible to the communities studied. Simon Down and Michael Hughes (2009) question the assumption that the ethnographer needs to act as the voice of the community on behalf of the community and present a pilot project where organisational ethnography is co-authored by the researcher and one of the participants. Involving participants in the writing up of the research can

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<sup>89</sup> I presented a paper entitled "Dance-Making as Organisational Behaviour: Patterns of Participation in Contemporary Choreographic Practices" at the 2015 NOFOD conference *Expanding Notions; Dance/Practice/Research/Method* (28-31 May, 2015, Iceland Academy of the Arts).

function as quality control on the researcher's work and, more than just say that ethnography can give its subjects a chance to reflect on their realities, actually engage them in the process of doing so. With plenty of dance practitioners already engaging in practice-as-research, the next step could be a co-produced organisational ethnography of their work environment that would reach them in a way a visiting researcher's writings cannot. This could also lead to a critical action research approach that "offer[s] research participants the opportunity to actively engage in processes of purposeful and reflective action in order to inquire into and change everyday issues of concern in organizations" (Sykes & Treleaven, 2009:227). Any ethical and organisational issues that dancers and choreographers may have are ultimately theirs to change. As a researcher, the best way I could hope to give something back to the participants is to make my research relevant to them, and what better way to do that than to make sure they have a sense of agency about the research project and its results?

#### 5.4 Conclusion

Dance literature is full of portrayals of voiceless dancers and controlling choreographers on the one hand and positively charged notions of collaboration on the other hand. I did not find either in my case studies. Instead, I found professionals cooperating to achieve a common goal, leaders and followers negotiating their influence but mostly not questioning their organisational roles. Dancers produced movement material in both processes, but I would not call either one collaborative in the sense of shared or distributed decision-making. When interviewed, the participants expressed their awareness of the potential problems in dancer-choreographer relationships and had experienced some themselves, but also confirmed what could be seen in the studio: they were not particularly silent or silenced and saw the myth of the

mute dancer as a thing of the past. They also talked about the importance of nonverbal communication, which I have maintained throughout to be an important aspect of the dancer's agency. A conversation analytic approach to interaction in the dance studio emphasises the embodied and multimodal nature of communication in the choreographic process and warrants further study. Finally, I have shown that dance companies are in many ways comparable to other organisations: they form and belong to communities of practice that learn by making sense of new situations, follow principles of leadership and followership recorded in organisational literature and are influenced by cultural trends towards collaborative work processes. Choreographers and dancers, as well as dance scholars, could benefit from reviewing their practices from this interdisciplinary perspective.

## Appendix A: Sample participant consent form



### ETHICS COMMITTEE

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

### EXTERNAL CASE STUDIES

**Title of Research Project:** Communication in the Choreographic Process

**Brief Description of Research Project:**

This research investigates how contemporary dancers and choreographers interact with each other. I want to explore the communicative skills used in the rehearsal process. The research consists of observation of two complete rehearsal processes leading to performances, a researcher-led practical choreographic project, and interviews with the participants in all three processes.

You will be invited to respond to interview questions about your experiences in the choreographic process. Interviews can occur at a time and place that is convenient for you. Some rehearsals as well as interviews will be filmed for later reference and reflection. The findings will be published in a doctoral dissertation.

**Investigator Contact Details:**

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**Consent Statement:**

I agree to take part in this research as described above and understand that

- I am free to withdraw from this research at any time without giving a reason.
- I will be interviewed as an acknowledged expert in my professional field. Any statements by me may be quoted in the dissertation and, unless I request anonymity (i.e. the use of a pseudonym), will be fully credited.
- no personal information exchanged during rehearsal and presentation periods will be utilised as part of this research project, but my anonymity will

not be maintained unless expressly requested, and cannot be fully guaranteed.

- any interview as a whole can be discontinued at any point and the researcher's notes destroyed at my request. In addition, at or after the interview I may designate any part of the interview as off the record or not for attribution.
- some rehearsals and interviews will be filmed and/or audio recorded as part of this research project. Excerpts of recorded material in the form of written transcripts may be used as part of the dissertation. Consent for the use of such recordings may be withdrawn at any time, and I may ask the researcher to turn off any recording device at any time.

I understand what this study involves and have been given a copy of this consent form.

Name .....

Signature .....

Date .....

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator. However, if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Head of Department (or if the researcher is a student you can also contact the Director of Studies.)

**Director of Studies Contact Details:**

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## **Appendix B: Ethical approval**

The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration under the reference DAN 12/ 005 in the Department of Dance and was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 14 September, 2012.

## **Appendix C: Interview questions**

The general questions in the first list below were the basis for my interviews with the dancers in the Repertory Company (the second case study). They are very similar to the set of questions I had used earlier with the Freelance Dancers but slightly more aimed at the themes of collaboration and group work that had emerged during the first case study. The production-specific questions of the second list are largely specific to the Repertory Production. The choreographers' interviews covered much of the same ground as the dancers' interviews but focused more on the specifics of each process. Some questions for choreographers are included at the end.

Apart from the first question, the interviews did not necessarily follow the order presented below. Depending on each interviewee's interests, some topics were skipped while others sparked follow-up questions. Everyone was asked if there was anything s/he wanted to add or discuss further at the end of the interview.

### **General questions for dancers**

1. Tell me about your dance/professional background (training, work experience).
2. What kind of work do you like/processes you enjoy? Have you had any particularly pleasant experiences in your working history, or unpleasant ones? What made them so?
3. How would you define your job as a dancer? What is your role in relation to the choreographer? How do you like to work (methods, tasks)? (How does the current process relate to your preferences?)

4. If there are problems with the choreographer, what can/do you do (or not do) to make the relationship work better? What do you hope from communication with a choreographer?
5. What does the word “collaboration” mean to you in the context of choreographic processes?
6. Is working in a second language/with people who have English as a second language ever an issue? Examples?
7. What does “communication in the choreographic process” mean to you? What, if anything, interests you about it?

#### Production-specific questions for dancers

1. What do you see as your role in this group/process? When [VChor] gives you group tasks, are you drawn to work with particular people in the company? Why/why not?
2. What do you like, or not, about this process?
3. Are you getting too little/enough/too much information from [VChor]? What would you like to know more/less about? Why?
4. What do you think of the idea of “sociocracy” used in this process? How do you understand it?
5. [While playing a video recording of the interviewee at work:] Do you remember this situation? Can you tell me what was happening?

## Further questions for choreographers

1. Can you talk about the differences and similarities between being a teacher and being a choreographer? [Both choreographers had experience as teachers.]
2. If you had to analyse the successes and failures of this process, what would they be? What did you learn from this process? If you could change something about the process, what would it be?
3. How did you choose these people to work with? [PChor only]
4. Do you have a strategy for giving notes? [VChor only]
5. What has it been like to work with a rehearsal director? [VChor only]

## Appendix D: Glossary of transcription symbols

The symbols used in the transcripts are based on those laid out in Jefferson (1994). I have not attempted to portray the participants' (most of them non-native speakers of English) accents, dialects or idiomatic pronunciation patterns in the transcripts, but have tried to give some sense of the turn-taking rhythm of rehearsals as well as an idea of the multimodality of interaction. I have used the following symbols:

=	No break
(.)	A short break
<u>word</u>	Stressed word or syllable
::	Prolonged sound (use more colons as needed)
↑↓	A shift to higher or lower pitch
.,?!	Punctuation is used for readability and to suggest a “standard” intonation, e.g. rising intonation for questions.
WORD	Loud speech compared to surrounding sounds
°word°	Quiet speech compared to surrounding sounds
—	A cut-off point (unfinished utterance)
( )	Unclear or inaudible speech, left empty or providing some indication of what the transcriber heard
(( ))	Transcriber's descriptions

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### **Interviews**

FreeD1, 17 January, 2013

FreeD2, 29 January, 2013

FreeD3, 31 January, 2013

FreeD4, 31 January, 2013

PChor, 10 April, 2013

RepD1, 18 September, 2013

RepD2, 19 September, 2013

RepD3, 20 September, 2013

RepD4, 23 September, 2013

RepD5, 23 September, 2013

RepD6, 24 September, 2013

RDir, 25 September, 2013

RepD7, 25 September, 2013

VChor, 26 September, 2013 & 21 February, 2014

RepD8, 27 September, 2013

RepD9, 30 September, 2013

RepD10, 1 October, 2013

RepD11, 3 October, 2013

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